MONKSBRIDGE

: JOHN AYSCOUGH :

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MONKSBRIDGE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

MAROTZ
DROMINA
SAN CELESTINO
MEZZOGIORNO
HURDCOTT
FAUSTULA
LEVIA PONDERA
OUTSIDERS—AND IN
A ROMAN TRAGEDY
GRACECHURCH

MONKSBRIDGE

BY JOHN AYSCOUGH, pseud.

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MONKSBRIDGE

PART I

CHAPTER I

On the morning of June 10th, 1864, the post arrived while we were at breakfast, and my mother at once perceived that one of her letters was from an unknown correspondent. As good news seldom came her way, it made her vaguely uneasy; but, being a brave creature, and wise too, she opened the letter at once to know the worst it might contain.

We all went on eating our bread and butter without watching her, but very soon a little cry of surprise that did not suggest pain or anxiety made us look up quickly.

"Children," she said, "I've had a legacy!"

We were thoroughly taken aback. Of course, we knew that other people did occasionally inherit money and land, goods and chattels, but it had never occurred to any of us that such things could come our way. Even when our father was alive we had been poor enough; since his death, nearly five years before, we had had about as little to live upon as any four people in the rank of gentry ever had. From the day of his marriage my poor father had always been talking of insuring his life, but he never did it; and his widow and three children had less than a hundred a year for rent, food, clothes, and education.

"A legacy!" cried Peterkin. "How much?"

My sister Sylvia looked as if she thought this quite a vulgar question. She was seventeen, and had strictly correct ideas. Being her twin, I was not really more than twenty minutes younger, but I had not Sylvia's decisive views, and felt scarcely so old even as Peterkin, who was barely fifteen.

"Well," said our mother, "it's a house, and there's the interest of six thousand pounds——"

"That's three hundred a year at five per cent.," observed Peterkin.

"It doesn't say it's at five per cent.," Mamma observed cautiously, looking up and down the letter in vain for any mention of the rate of interest.

"Who left it?" asked my brother, demanding another lump of sugar from Sylvia, as if he knew we could afford it now.

Sylvia gave it him—not in her fingers, as he suggested, but with the sugar-tongs—frowning a little as if to reprove his too-eager snatching at the fruits of wealth.

"That," my mother answered, "is the funny part of it. It comes from Uncle Stapleton."

We had heard of him. He was Sir Stapleton Drumm, of Drumm Hall, and was an uncle of our mother's mother. He had only seen his grand-niece on rare occasions, and had been much annoyed by her marrying a "curate with blue eyes" without deigning to explain what coloured eyes curates ought to have. We knew that the old gentleman was dead, for our mother had seen some notice of it in a newspaper, but it certainly had not occurred to her or to us that any such result as this would accrue from it.

"'The interest of six thousand pounds,'" said Mamma, half reading from the letter, and half talking aloud out of her own head—"'of six thousand pounds till I marry again.' That's so funny, since he was so cross with me for marrying your dear father."

"I suppose," remarked Peterkin, "he thought, as you'd married the wrong man once, you might marry some one worse next time, and he'd punish you if he couldn't stop you."

Mamma laughed, but Sylvia said, "Peterkin!!!" in her finest manner.

"Well, that's about the size of it," my brother persisted.

"'The size of it.'" And Sylvia looked as if no legacy could atone for a brother who used such expressions.

"I dare say it is," said Mamma; "Uncle Stapleton was a queer old man."

"Let's hope you have a dozen great-uncles all just as queer," said Peterkin.

"He's the only one," said Mamma. "If I die unmarried I can leave the six thousand pounds to you."

"To me?" asked our brother.

"No, my dear—among you all. If I do marry, the interest is to be divided equally between you three."

"You're young yet—and there's Simon Blowhard," Peterkin remarked cheerfully, to annoy Sylvia, as I quite understood.

It *did* annoy her. But Mamma only laughed again. Simon Blowhard was an elderly widower, whose letters were addressed "George Boson, Esq." He sat behind us in church and breathed very heavily, especially during the sermon; once he had followed us down the church-yard with a pocket-handkerchief, really dropped by Sylvia, which he presented to our mother with great ceremony and a heightened complexion.

"Now he'll think you're an heiress, Mugs, and speak up," Peterkin declared vivaciously.

Sylvia looked unutterable things, but said nothing; she was tired of asking in what language "Mugs" was a contraction of "Mother."

Presently we learned that the house bequeathed by Uncle Stapleton was at Monksbridge, and that it had a name, being called Cross Place.

"In allusion," suggested Peterkin, "to the temper of the testator."

"That," said our mother, "is ungrateful, seeing he has left it to us."

It was just like her to say "us" when it was left simply and unconditionally to her.

"Cross Place," said Sylvia, thoughtfully; she was thinking of Hampton Place, a mile or two out of our town, where Lord Coldhampton lived.

"Reminds one of Laurel Place," observed Peterkin, who was as sharp as a needle, and followed the train of our sister's musings with perfect accuracy.

"It doesn't remind *me* in the least of Laurel Place," Sylvia declared warmly. "Laurel Place was *built* by Mr. Sugger, and nothing will ever make it look older, or as if anybody but a retired grocer lived in it. And the laurels won't grow up, and it has bow windows, and it's *in* the town—Grange Road is *in* the town."

Peterkin was delighted. Our pleasures were few, and had to be cheap; it cost him nothing at all to tease his very superior sister.

CHAPTER II

THREE months afterwards we were living at Cross Place, and there was nothing whatever about it to remind us of Mr. Sugger and his juvenile laurels that time could not age, though dust might stale, and a dry summer was apt to wither.

"It's just the right size," Mamma declared; and she would have said the same had it been half as big, or twice as big again.

"What for?" asked Peterkin.

"For us, of course," said Sylvia.

"For four hundred a year," said Mamma.

We really had four hundred a year. For there was a bit of land attached to Cross Place that was let off at a pleasant little rental. Sylvia was not quite content with the letting off; it would, she felt, be more dignified to keep it in hand; but she liked to think that the dairyman and butcher who rented it were our tenants.

"The tenantry," said Peterkin, "shall have rejoicings when I come of age. Mr. Melch shall present an address and twenty-one pats of butter, and Mr. Kitney shall present another and a tribute of chops."

"Peterkin," begged his mother, "do leave your sister alone."

Monksbridge was not in the least like the ugly new town where we had lived in the midlands; it was very old, and very staid, with a singularly large proportion of houses that looked as if they defied any but gentry to live in them.

A river cut the little town in two unequal halves; or rather on one side of it lay Monksbridge; over the bridge, in Wales, was Llanthamy. The river (pronounced Tem) was the Tham, that joined the lordly Dee eight miles below Monksbridge. Monksbridge is in the rich and aristocratic Rentshire, where the squires are so great that they disdain baronets, until, as sometimes happens, they become baronets themselves; even then they merely acquiesce in their new condition as a temporary measure—a brief pause on the way to a peerage.

Our big man on the Monksbridge side was, when we went there, Mr. de Braose, of Monkspark, of whom more will be heard in due time. The river for several miles divided his territory from that of Lord Monksbridge, who had originally been Sir Silas Monk.

Almost the first person who called told us all about Sir Silas, and his odd behaviour in taking Monksbridge for his title. This was Mrs. de Braose, of Island Court, who landed at our garden-steps, and would have taken us, like an angel, unawares, had she not sent on a footman to ask if our mother was at home. As it was, Sylvia went down to the river to meet and escort her.

" My dear," said our visitor, disembarking, " I hope Mrs. Auberon will excuse my taking her in flank in this way. But, you see, I live on an island, and it's much easier and pleasanter landing at your steps than rowing down to Bridge Wharf and landing there. Living on an island, one has one's stables and carriage on the mainland, and one has to row ashore before one can drive anywhere. It's only half a mile from Bridge

Wharf to your door, and that's a short way to drive, but too far for me to walk. I'm rather stout."

In saying so, Mrs. de Braose did not overstate the case; she was the fattest lady of her height Sylvia had ever seen, but her stoutness took nothing from her dignity, and Mrs. de Braose (pronounced "Brooze," by the way) looked both dignified and important.

"I should think it must be delightful to live on an island," said Sylvia.

"Should you, my dear? Well, you do, you know. But, then, England doesn't belong to you, and my island does belong to me—I bought it; Sir Silas wanted to, so I cut in and offered five hundred more. It isn't our Dower House, Island Court isn't. But, you see, there are two Dowagers at present; I'm Mr. de Braose's mother, and his uncle's widow, Lady Llantwddwy, is alive still—my son succeeded his uncle, you know—so she reigns at Little Park, that's our regular Dower House; and when he married I bought Island Court. These are pretty rose-walks. I like to pause and admire them—and take breath. And, being strangers, you may as well know who your visitors are. Some queer folk will call, I dare say—we have all sorts at Monksbridge; but we're all good people, and your Mamma will soon know which is which. My friend the Baroness planted these rose-walks; she was quite a gardener. Is this your mother? How do you do, Mrs. Auberon? I've been making my apologies to your daughter for boarding you in this manner. She'll make my excuses; you don't want them all over again from me."

"It's very friendly of you to call so soon," said my mother.

"Well, I hope we shall be friends. Monksbridge *is* friendly. A little place at the world's end, but we're all very fond of it here. I did not put off calling, for I knew the place was left to you all furnished—and charming furniture too—so that you would not take long settling in. I knew your uncle once, but he only lived a month here. He made the place very nice, and swore he should live here for ever, because the neighbours at Drumm Hall were too friendly. But when we all flocked to call upon him he wouldn't stand it, and went off in a fine pet. I was the last to call, and he nearly ate me. 'Do you *want* anything?' he asked me. 'Nothing particular,' I told him; and he said then there was no sense in my coming. 'We're too old for nonsense,' he declared, and that wasn't very civil to a lady. However, it's a good thing for you he came at all, for he had a perfect taste in furniture and pictures and china and so forth, and now it's all here for you. I'll sit here, if you please; I call this my chair, for I used to be here constantly when my friend Baroness von Trautwitz had the place. Sir Stapleton let her have it dirt cheap on condition she agreed to take a month's warning, like a kitchen-maid; however, she had it seven years, and was lucky enough. She won't find herself in such clover at Burgh House. Of course she hated turning out, but she'll call, and you'll find her a good creature."

"I'm sure," said our mother, quite guiltily, "I'm very sorry our coming should have been such an inconvenience to her."

But Sylvia looked quite prepared to ignore any pretensions the Baroness might make to being a victim.

"Mamma," she observed, "she had Cross Place for seven years——"

"For an old song," said Mrs. de Braose.

Sylvia liked this expression much better than "dirt-cheap," and adopted it.

"For an old song, Mamma."

"Yes, but seven years is a long time," said my dear mother, "and I dare say she got very fond of all these things," looking round on her own pictures and furniture, "and felt as if she were parting from her own household goods."

Sylvia looked as if she thought this great nonsense, if not great presumption, on the part of this Baroness; but Mrs. de Braose reached out a plump and very pretty hand and patted my mother's, which was much prettier, though much slimmer.

"My dear," she declared, "I'm sure you'll not quarrel with Julia von Trautwitz. And she's an excellent creature in spite of her whim-whams."

"Can she talk English?" asked Sylvia, anxious, I suspected, to be able to quell the Baroness in her mother-tongue.

"My dear, she *is* English—or Welsh rather; of a very good family—the Llewellyns, of Clwd. The Baron was only her husband. He was a Bavarian and represented his Court as Minister in Sweden, in Bernadotte's time; that's why she makes her servants call her Excellency, which is, between you and me, great nonsense. English ambassadresses drop the Excellency when they sink into private life; but then, English ambassadresses don't sink far. So you think you'd like to live on an island of your own! You must come and see mine. You all must. It's a pretty place, and the house much too nice to be left to the ghosts. They don't trouble me, and servants don't mind them either if you give them good wages. Lord Monksbridge, as he calls himself, can't keep his, and my lady always pretends it's the ghosts at Llanthamy Castle; but that's all bosh, for we know his old father *built* 'the castle'—fancy building a castle in the eighteenth century, my dear!"—and here, with a singular intuition, Mrs. de Braose appealed to my sister, who curled her very pretty lips slightly—"and there ain't any ghosts in those sorts of castles—*spirits* enough, if all we hear is true! But my lady has a temper, and my lord is a skinflint; servants won't stand the combination."

"Monksbridge," suggested Sylvia, who knew, I supposed, as much about it as I did, "is not an old title."

"It's as old, my dear, as my coachman's baby, and that's nineteen months, as I ought to know who am his god-mother and gave him an ugly mug (which Providence gave him before me) and a spoon, as I dare say he'll be himself if he's like Watkins. Old, my dear! It's so new that it smells of paint, like the coronets on the hot-water cans—I do assure you, Mrs. Auberon, the hot-water cans at Llanthamy Castle all have coronets on them!"

"And why," asked Sylvia, deeply interested, "didn't he take the title of Llanthamy?"

"The lord knows, my dear—the Lord of Llanthamy Castle, I mean. All the land on Monksbridge side is my son's (except River Street in the town, the new street where the wool-factory people live), and all the land for nine miles round. River Street belongs to Sir Silas, so did the bit where the New Jerusalem stands (he gave it them when he was standing against my brother-in-law for Parliament); and one or two new pot-houses are his, the Monk Arms and the Black Cow, for instance (his father built the Monk Arms when he got his shield from the Heralds College), and this man had the Black Cow opened when he got his peerage and supporters—a black cow and a white goose. The wool-carders would have had a White Goose to get drunk at if the magistrates hadn't refused another licence. His taking the title of Monksbridge is the most monstrous thing. But my son only laughs when I talk of it, and says after all *he* has Monkspark, and Sir Silas only has Llanthamy Castle where the chimneys all smoke, so that the geese are as black as the cows over them. There are cows and geese carved everywhere at Llanthamy Castle, and some say the geese are the image of Sir Silas, and the cows of my lady."

"But Monk is the family name," observed Sylvia. "I suppose they're old inhabitants here, though the title is new?"

"That's just what you're meant to suppose. This man's grandfather was a miner in South Wales, and his name was Evans. But he made a great fortune; his son doubled it every ten or twenty years, and died a millionaire. He came into the world Sammy Evans, and went out of it Sir Samuel Monk. He changed his name when he bought the property over there—in the train, I suppose, when he came to take possession."

Mrs. de Braose spoke so warmly on the subject of Sir Silas that, when the housemaid came in with cards on a salver, and my mother had read the names on them, she almost trembled as she turned to her visitor and said with nervous apology—

"Lord and Lady Monksbridge!"

The old lady laughed very cheerfully, quite unmoved at the announcement.

"Well," she said, "you'll not find them at all dangerous." And she settled herself in her chair as though to dispel any idea of her shortening her own visit on account of their arrival.

"The footman said," Hannah almost whispered, "I was to come and see if you was at home, Ma'am. I said I knew you was; but he said to kindly go and see."

All this was fifty years ago, and I hope Hannah will be forgiven for saying "you was." She did not dress fashionably, nor have silver-backed hair-brushes; but she was an excellent servant, and lived with us eighteen years, till her marriage with a flourishing carpenter, at the deliberate age of forty.

"Yes, we're at home," said my mother, who never thought of herself apart from Sylvia.

"They're very good people," Mrs. de Braose remarked when Hannah was gone. "We're all good people here, as I told you, though they're not true Monksbridgers, living on the wrong side of the river."

"I was afraid you might mind," said my mother.

"Me mind! We're *au mieux*." And she nodded and smiled vigorously. With such a short neck it was quite hard to understand how she could nod at all.

When Hannah reappeared with the new visitors there was some slight parley as to which of them should enter first. My lady seemed to hold back for her lord to go before her, and Mrs. de Braose watched and listened delightedly.

"No, my lady, no! Do you *precede*," her sharp ears heard him beg. "I'm not Lord Lieutenant here—on the wrong side of the water, you know."

Mrs. de Braose explained to us later on that Lord Monksbridge was Lord Lieutenant of his county, and as such held that, representing Her Majesty, he could not without disloyalty yield the *pas* to his wife.

Lady Monksbridge, with meek protest, entered first.

"Lord and Lady Monksbridge!" announced Hannah, who knew nothing of Lord Lieutenants, but had scriptural ideas as to the pre-eminence of man.

Lady Monksbridge was as tall and lean as Mrs. de Braose was short and fat, and her dress was so fashionable that one only saw the bust of her husband behind her crinoline. Her gown was of royal-blue silk, with a Greek Key pattern in black velvet running round the flounces, enormous at the bottom row, and narrowing to the waist. I had never seen the Greek Key pattern before except in stucco round a cornice.

Lady Monksbridge was about fifty, and moved in what she thought a willowy fashion—if you can imagine a willow in a crinoline.

My lord was not so tall, and was five or six years older. His trousers were of "Shepherd's Plaid"—little dazzling squares of black and white, about the size of dice. He was handsome and remarkably clean—quite unlike a miner, I thought. All the top of his head was bald, but the hair at one side, plentiful, long, and very black, was drawn over, like a lid, and covered up the bare parts except when he stooped to pick up Mrs. de Braose's card-case, on which occasion the whole lid lifted and fell to the right in a painful manner.

After having shaken hands with my mother, and after Sylvia had been introduced, our visitors turned to Mrs. de Braose.

"You'll not expect me to get up," she observed with smiling affability. "Once down I have to be *hauled* up."

"It's wonderful," Sylvia remarked to us afterwards, "how a woman with simply no neck can bow as she does. Lady Monksbridge's neck is as long as a goose's—one of the family geese—but *she* can't bow—she ducks."

"Gooses, you mean," suggested Peterkin.

"And Lord Monksbridge," added Sylvia, ignoring him, and slightly raising her voice, "bows like a man in a shop. Any well-bred butler could teach him."

"You never saw a butler in your life," said Peterkin. We hadn't returned Mrs. de Braose's call, or Lord and Lady Monksbridge's, then.

"Perkin," pleaded our mother, "do leave your sister alone." (She never called me his sister.) "I was so glad," she went on, "that they got on so well together. From the way Mrs. de Braose spoke of them I was quite frightened when they were announced."

"Oh!" said Sylvia, coolly, "she was all graciousness. She wasn't in the least gracious to *us*." And my sister smiled complacently.

"What was she to you?" demanded Peterkin; "*un*gracious?"

Sylvia deigned no reply, and Mamma only said, "Perkin, you'd better let your sister alone. She under*stands* these things. Of course, I saw the difference. Even Marjory must have noticed it."

"Marjory," observed Sylvia, "seemed rather dazzled by my lord—I suppose it was his trousers. They *were* dazzling. *Did* you hear him ask Mrs. de Braose if she was *riding,* and offer her a *lift?*"

"On a pillion?" asked Peterkin.

"No, in their landau—as far as the Bridge Wharf, I suppose. I think he would have pressed it, only he remembered that Bridge Wharf is in his own county, and the Lord Lieutenant could not sit back to the horses in his own county."

Peterkin, who had not heard Mrs. de Braose's explanation about the Lord Lieutenant's ideas as to precedence, stared hard.

"Sylvia talks," he remarked, "as if we had been very particular at Rawtown about the lords we chose to associate with. What's the matter with this one?"

"Nothing. He is a worthy person," our sister replied calmly. "Quite worthy."

She spoke as graciously as Mrs. de Braose could have done. In her own way Sylvia was very clever.

"Is the Dowager Mrs. What's-her-name worthy?" demanded Peterkin, opening one eye all the wider for his leisurely closing of the other.

"Not in the least. She's a lady."

Sylvia did not often laugh, but she smiled often—and well. Her mouth never looked so pretty as when she was smiling.

"I liked her," said our mother, "and I think she liked us too; but it was you, dear, she *got on* with."

"We understood each other," said Sylvia. "It is very interesting having Llanthamy Castle over there"—and she pointed slightingly with her left hand across the river—"and Monkspark on *our* side. The new lord and the old squire. Of course, these Monksbridges are nobodies. The de Braoses——"

"Bruises?" queried Peterkin.

"Sylvia always knows," murmured our mother. "De Braose is pronounced 'de Brooze.'"

This tribute was quite just. Sylvia always did know. Had she read a surname spelled St. Mark, she would instantly have understood it should be called "Summack"; indeed, I remember her at ten years old quoting the sixth chapter of "Sinjun."

"The de Braoses," Sylvia continued, "are really people; they have owned all this land for over seven hundred years. About six peerages are dormant in their family. *Our* Mrs. de Braose would be Lord Pole of the March had she been a man. And the last squire, this one's uncle, married a peeress in her own right."

Sylvia told us all this in an easy casual manner as though she had known it all her life, whereas she had known it about twenty minutes. Sir Stapleton had left any number of Peerages, County Families, and such works at Cross Place, and my sister had almost a genius for the rapid assimilation of the sort of information they conveyed. She also had a way of telling what she knew that gave the impression of its being only a small part of her knowledge, when it was all she had at the moment.

Peterkin rubbed his eyes and looked round the room as if in search of stray noblemen, and slowly whistling, shrugged his broad young shoulders.

"You, my dear," he would sometimes say to myself, with engaging frankness, "are far from clever, and it is just as well; one family could not support twin Sylvias."

CHAPTER III

OUR next visitor was Miss Belvoir, who called on the following day, and came neither in a boat nor a landau, but in a Bath-chair, drawn by a gaspy old man called Hopple. He was not anybody else's servant, so Miss Belvoir considered him hers, and spoke of him as "my man," but he only worked three out of the seven days for her. On Sundays he was parish clerk, on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays he was a cobbler.

Some people said that there was no reason on earth why Miss Belvoir should not walk about like any one else, and I never heard of any lameness or disease to account for the Bath-chair, and she was not more than fifty when we went to Monksbridge, but, after her father's death, she had no longer a pony-carriage, and she had a spirit that could not brook going afoot. The late Rev. Lionel Belvoir had been Vicar of Monksbridge, and very early in her visit his daughter mentioned him by name to avoid our taking up a wrong pronunciation of it. She was Miss "Beever," and felt that much depended on it. The consciousness of being a "Beever" gave an arid flavour of dukeishness to her manners. Of the actually ducal family of that name she was fond of explaining that they only became possessed of Belvoir Castle "by a mere marriage late in the fifteenth century. They are Belvoirs only in the female line, and ours was the elder branch. I am a male Belvoir."

Her claim to being a male Belvoir was partly sustained by a pale but distinct moustache, and by a voice of gloomy bass.

The address on Miss Belvoir's card was *English Gate,* and we already knew the place. It was a sort of tower, at the Monksbridge end of the bridge, with an arch under which the roadway passed. It was a sombre, low-browed sort of building, like a weazened little castle that had grown old without ever growing up. It was, indeed, black with age; the windows were small and deep in enormously thick walls, and it had a portcullis, and machicolated battlements ran round the top. The habitable part was all on the left-hand side of the road, except for one room over the arch which was Miss Belvoir's dining-room; if you lunched with her you often heard weird rumblings under your feet as some heavy cart passed on to the bridge. Her drawing-room, bedroom, kitchen, and servant's bedroom were all on the left side, and there she had a small garden with a high battlemented wall to match the top of the tower. In it Hopple worked on three mornings of each week, and from it, as from her drawing-room, there was a lovely view down the river.

Miss Belvoir's dress was not really feudal, but it suggested a correspondence or sympathy with the fortalice in which she lived. It was not an ancestral home, being rented of the mayor and corporation, whom she was bound to supply at Christmas with ten turkeys, and at midsummer with ten live salmon and as many fat capons. Keeping no poultry, and being no fisherwoman, she remitted at each of those seasons three five-pound notes, and received from his worship a formal receipt for the live-stock.

" I moved there—to English Gate—on my dear father's death," Miss Belvoir told us. "Mr. Beever was Vicar of Monksbridge, and for thirty years (since before my birth, in fact) the Priory had been my home. After the Priory I could not bear the idea of living in a mere *house*."

"I should have thought," observed our Sylvia, alert for information, "that Mr. *Beever*"—distinctly to set the lady's mind at rest—"would have been more than Vicar. The Priory is such an immense church—Rector would have seemed more suitable."

"Yes, my dear, you are right—in principle. But, you see, the Abbot of Marybridge was Rector of Monksbridge, and took the great tithes. The church was built by the Abbey and made a sub-priory of it. Mr. de Braose represents the Abbot and is lay Rector now; he draws the great tithes—for Monkspark is only the name they gave to Marybridge Abbey when the de Braoses got it at the Dissolution. The squire has many quaint abbatial rights. The chancel of our church is his, and marriages and baptisms have to be registered at Monkspark—they keep the book in the billiard-room; and Mr. de Braose has a mitre for second crest, and bears a crozier on a canton in his arms. But my father, Mr. Beever, *was* more than Vicar; he was Rural Dean. In his Ruri-decanal office he was very active, and but for his death would now have been Archdeacon ten years—the appointment found him in his coffin."

Miss Belvoir's voice sounded so sepulchral that I found it depressing, but Sylvia liked it. She was a gaunt, lean lady, was our visitor, austerely clad, without a hint of crinoline or flounce, and her bonnet looked incomplete without a visor. But though she looked poor and was not of a jocund demeanour, she had, Sylvia assured us later on, the grand manner, which mattered much more. Sylvia could be all things to all men so long as they had the grand manner and showed they had a right to it.

Miss Belvoir's features were "Roman," and her complexion, if bilious, was rather distinguished. Her feet, like Miss Brontë's and Miss Ferrier's, were small and pretty, and any vanity she had centred in them. Her boots were never shabby or ill-made.

"You will like my abode," she said, turning to my mother, but meaning Sylvia. "I must call it an abode, for it is not a house—a river-tower, rather."

"I should love," said Sylvia, "to live in a river-tower."

"Should you, my dear? Well, so do I. It has a *character*. And there's plenty of room for me and my reduced establishment." Thus did Miss Belvoir allude to Hopple's granddaughter, who was her tire-woman and cook, kitchen-maid, laundry-maid, stillroom-maid, and chamberlain. "I have a delightful drawing-room, with a vaulted stone roof, and a dining-room that was the guard-room."

"I should love," said Sylvia, "to dine in a guard-room. Even a mutton cutlet would taste medievally."

"It does," Miss Belvoir declared, with strong signs of approval.

Strictly speaking, Miss Belvoir had never dined in her guard-room. At one she lunched in it, and at five she drank tea; at eight she discussed a sardine or a poached egg, with a moderate glass of negus. If she dined it was abroad.

"My dear," she added, "I hope you will accompany

Mrs. Auberon when she favours me with a call, and" —turning to me—"you also."

"Oh yes!" remarked Sylvia, slightly raising one of her pretty eyebrows. She always did accompany Mamma on such occasions, or rather Mamma never called anywhere without Sylvia in command. "I shall be delighted. Marjory is often occupied with her studies."

Sylvia had at that time a habit of speaking of me as though I were several years her junior, and Miss Belvoir accepted the situation. She clearly set me down as a schoolroom girl, and smiled encouragingly as if to bid me not despair, for I should grow out of it (D.V.). In her notes inviting her friends to tea, she always mentioned that she would be at home (D.V.) on Wednesday.

Sylvia was taller than me, and, in one of her old coarse dresses, I looked shorter than I was. She was in long frocks, and had her hair up. Having had measles six months before I had no hair to put up, but only short curls reaching to the nape of my neck. Sylvia, of course, had not had the measles; she never did have tiresome diseases. At seventeen she was tall, slim, and very pretty—more than pretty—with beautiful and abundant silky dark-brown hair, and dark-brown eyes, large and soft. Her mouth and teeth were quite perfect, neither too large nor too small. Her nose was entrancing, not really *retroussée,* but very nearly, thin, and most aristocratic.

At seventeen I was almost fat, and my eyes were blue (like Hannah's, as Sylvia observed; and it is true that Hannah's eyes *were* blue, but they were remarkably pleasant); and my curls were of a startling dark red, like a horse-chestnut, which is not in the least the colour of a chestnut horse. My mouth was too wide (because, Sylvia said, I laughed too much), and my nose was larger than any miniature portrait we possessed authorized. Sylvia had the Auberon nose, as a miniature of our father's grandmother proved.

"Having no figure you should," she used to impress upon me, "cultivate carriage. Look at Mrs. de Braose. She is fat, and she is almost a dwarf; but her carriage!"

"I think," Mamma pleaded, "that Madge will grow. I was short at her age."

"Mamma! You were never *dumpy*. Madge should not trust to mere growth. That's simply gambling with Providence. She should learn carriage; we should use the means in our power, and not lean on contingencies. Carriage and manner are within her reach. Look at Miss Belvoir! I never saw a plainer woman; and her clothes aren't worth a scarecrow's stealing. But you can't think of her looks, nor of her alpaca cape——"

"Was it alpaca? I didn't notice that," murmured our mother.

"Of course it was," said Sylvia, who couldn't think of Miss Belvoir's clothes, "and of no fashion ever revealed to mankind, and a poor quality, and badly made. But her manner would carry off a dozen capes. She has breeding all over her."

"I don't think Madge could ever say 'My father was Rural Dean,' like Miss Belvoir."

"No; and it would not be true," said Sylvia, who was always rather matter-of-fact. "Fibs are not at all in the grand manner."

Mamma looked mildly surprised, for dear Sylvia didn't invariably stick to literal truth.

"Manner comes," my sister continued gravely, "from remembering what is behind one."

Mamma glanced hastily over her shoulder, as if to see if anything particular was behind *her*.

"Miss Belvoir never forgets she is a——"

"Male Belvoir," I suggested.

"Marjory dear, *don't* try for smartness," my sister entreated. "At your age it is offensive; at *any* age it is rarely combined with that repose so essential to a fine manner. Wit is seldom well-bred. What I was about to say when you interrupted was—remember always you are an Auberon, and a de la Beche on Mamma's side."

Our mother had been a Miss Beech, and the ancient form of the name was de la Beche, which my sister greatly preferred. She herself had been christened Sylvia Beech, but always signed herself Sylvia de la Beche Auberon. An ancestor of Mamma's, Nicholas de la Beche, was summoned to Parliament, as a Baron by Writ, by Edward III., on 25th February, 1342, and Sylvia never forgot him. It was, I suspected, by remembering him that I was to attain the grand manner.

"All right," I said cheerfully; "I'll bear in mind that I'm a Baron by Writ, in the female line, like the Duke of Rutland."

"That," said Sylvia, "is nonsense. Should the title be revived, *I* am the elder daughter."

"And there's Peterkin," observed Mamma.

"I regard *him* merely as an Auberon." And, so saying, Sylvia left the room.

All this, however, took place when Miss Belvoir had gone; we must return to her.

"Can you," she asked us, as her visit drew to its close, "come to me on Wednesday next? It is not very far to English Gate, but I should be sorry for you to have the walk for nothing. If you called unexpectedly I might be out—and you keep, I think, no——"

"Bath-chair? No," Sylvia put in sweetly. She was annoyed at the allusion to our having no carriage. Mamma blushed, but perhaps Miss Belvoir did not quite catch what my sister had said, for she merely went on—

"No; I thought not. The Baroness did not either, but she is such a walker. Well, I shall be at home on Wednesday——"

"I think, Mamma," said Sylvia, who had no idea of cheapening her family by too easy a concession, "that you said we should have to return the Monksbridges' call on Wednesday."

Mamma looked as if she did not recollect having said so, and tried to look as if she did.

"Perhaps we ought," she murmured. "First calls should be returned at once."

"I hoped *I* was your first caller," said Miss Belvoir.

"Mrs. de Braose called yesterday," Sylvia remarked slightly, "and the Monksbridges." She almost smiled as she mentioned their name, as if they were a recognized joke. "Charming people," she added with a demure propriety.

"*We* all think Mrs. de Braose charming," said Miss Belvoir, almost overpowered by my sister's *sang-froid*.

Sylvia smiled outright. "Oh! Mrs. de Braose! She is quite different."

And Miss Belvoir was, I think, overpowered altogether. Herself entirely of the de Braose faction, she had never heard the nobility of Lord and Lady Monksbridge so entirely treated as a local pleasantry.

"Lord Monksbridge has a good deal of influence with his party," she remarked. "Of course the title is new."

"And it never will be more than stale. Those sort of titles never become old. No party can give its rich adherents what only the Middle Ages can give. Pedigrees can't begin in the nineteenth century. A Radical nobody may become a peer, but he cannot become a Man of Blood. Nothing can be called blood that does not flow back to the Plantagenet times."

Miss Belvoir fidgeted in her seat, but with a certain admiration.

"But, my dear, of course *we* shall not see it, but in five hundred years' time, Lord Monksbridge's will be a very old family; it isn't more than five hundred years from Plantagenet times now!"

Sylvia smiled. "Five hundred years in the modern world will not make a family feudal," she said calmly. "The de Belvoirs, the de la Beches, and the de l'Auberons were feudal. In the twenty-fourth century the Monksbridges will be no more feudal than they are now."

Her tone, always mild and almost indolent, admitted of no discussion, and Miss Belvoir was at heart all on her side.

"My dear Mrs. Auberon," she said, "your daughter has a spirit that is rare indeed in this vulgar age.

She goes beyond *me*. I know money is nothing"—her own was only by about a hundred and nine pounds a year removed from nothing—"but I see so much made of it, that at times I find it hard to so thoroughly disregard it and its influence——"

"Money," said Sylvia, "is anything but nothing. It buys everything that is for sale. Blood isn't. The thing is to combine them. If Sir Silas had been wise he would have married Blood—then the next Lord Monksbridge might have been *really* noble, in the female line. Half a loaf is better than no bread."

"They say," said Miss Belvoir, "his son is likely to marry Lady Agatha St. Rand, the Earl of Pall Mall's daughter."

"*That* won't give him Blood," Sylvia explained coolly. "Lord Pall Mall's grandfather was found in a basket, on a doorstep in the Strand, and Strand was all the name he had. St. Rand is all nonsense; the title moved westward with the family—and I dare say the Earl's son will be Marquis of Piccadilly, and *his* son Duke of Knightsbridge. But they'll all be Strands—out of a basket."

Miss Belvoir rubbed the frosty tip of her Roman nose with her card-case, and Mamma stared in admiration. *How* did Sylvia know all this? What cannot genius learn—with "Anecdotes of the Aristocracy" in the house?

"Well, shall we say Friday (D.V.)?" asked Miss Belvoir, quite meekly. And her tone was not usually meek.

And we said "Friday," Sylvia *volente*.

CHAPTER IV

Sylvia managed us all; we had seen it coming for a year or two, and only Peterkin really objected. Mamma was made for slavery, and I for subjection, and Peterkin, resolute against succumbing himself, could breathe no spirit of rebellion into Mamma; he breathed it daily into me, but, much more than daily, Sylvia sat on any inflation he had inspired and exploded it. On him she did not sit, for she was fond of easy seats, and her brother was not easy.

"It's a shame if she makes Mugs a snob," he declared fervently. "She's welcome to *you,* if you're fool enough to let her snobbify you. You're a mere twin."

"I defy the Archangel Gabriel to make a snob of Mamma," I expostulated, with loose and hasty rhetoric.

"Sylvia doesn't remind me a bit of archangels," said my brother.

"But Mamma's an angel," I argued, sure of my point and indifferent to lines of argument.

"Yes. But if Sylvia persuades her that she's not a curate's widow, but a sort of Dowager Baroness by writ! They're all dowagers here. There's a Dowager Viscountess and a Dowager Ambassadress (German Ambassadress from Wales), and a Dowager Squiress, and you'll be a Dowager Idiot before you're twenty if you don't stick up to Sylvia."

Willing to justify myself, like the lawyer in the Bible, I said—

"She's my twin; and how pretty she is! And she *is* clever. Any one would think we had a thousand a year—five thousand!—she manages so well. You know Mamma could never keep accounts."

"What's the *good* of accounts? A mutton chop doesn't cost less because you write the price down in a book. And Sylvia thinks money's for anything but to spend. Have *you* a penny more to spend for Sylvia's accounts—or I? If Mugs gives me five shillings she looks as if she was stealing it."

Poor Perkin! He was always getting five shillingses out of Mamma; and in a way she *was* stealing them, for she had listened, with as much appearance of understanding as she could assume, to Sylvia's explanation of how four hundred a year could keep Cross Place and us going without our falling into debt, and had said "Most certainly," whenever Sylvia said, "We must not spend more than so much on this, or more than so much on that." My sister allowed a certain sum for Peterkin (perhaps with an air of considering him an expensive luxury), and all those five shillingses were extras, by no means included in her calculation. Her total estimate for everything came to £369 17*s.* 8*d.* per annum.

"So," she had bid us note, "there will be thirty pounds over—in round numbers."

"What's the good of having thirty pounds over in round numbers?" Perkin complained.

"In case, for instance, of illness."

"But you've allowed for doctor and chemist already. Do you propose to send for Dr. Floke in perfect health, or to take pills for pleasure?"

"The sum I put down for medical attendance and chemist is for *ordinary* medical attendance—coughs, colds, bilious attacks of *yours,* and so on. It would not cover real illnesses."

"What's the good of being really ill?"

"I must say," Mamma interposed, "Sylvia never is ill herself. It's——"

And she paused, unwilling, while justifying my sister, to condemn me, for it was I who had indulged in uncalled-for measles and chicken-poxes, pleurisy once, and bronchitis twice.

I felt this and blushed. "I've *had* most things now," I said apologetically.

"You're capable of having gout to-morrow," Sylvia observed, with unmoved calmness. "It's best to be on the safe side."

"She eats much less than you," said Perkin, brutally. "Gout, indeed!"

"No, she doesn't," I cried indignantly; "only she eats slowly and I gobble."

"Yes, dear; you do," Sylvia agreed, "and so does he. It's not a refined habit. But my point is this: if we keep out of debt, it's our own fault if we're not comfortable and respected here at Cross Place. There's no rent to pay, and no rates—thanks to Uncle Stapleton giving a thousand pounds towards the restoration of the Guildhall on condition that this estate should be rate-free." (Sylvia liked to talk of "this estate.") "The garden half feeds us; and the style of living, I think, is very moderate in Monksbridge. Cross Place gives us a position, and we ourselves can assure it; but if we get into debt we shall be wretched and despised."

Mamma gurgled a melancholy approval. Sylvia had common sense, and a conscience of her own; but Mamma had imagination, and I knew she was picturing us in woeful procession to the workhouse.

Peterkin, unable to controvert Sylvia's position, objected to the application of her argument. Of course we should keep out of debt, but not by tedious scrutiny of expenditure.

I always knew she was right; it was part of her general superiority. Perhaps, had I stepped into the world five and twenty minutes earlier, I might have been less inferior; as it was I merely embraced the fact—gingerly.

"Education!" said my sister. "For a time *that* must be considered. Madge plays badly, but she likes it; there's a Miss Boon, I find, who gives lessons at two shillings each, provided you take a course. Marjory must take it." She spoke exactly as though it were a pill, and I was to swallow it without dallying. "And I think we should both of us have French lessons. There's a school—Magnolia House—and the French governess there could come here. I will arrange that, and I see my way to doing it cheaply. Mrs. Fox is, I gather, more or less in society here. (Her husband was a perpetual curate in the neighbourhood, and rather looked on.) She and her daughter will call, I dare say; and one would wish to be particularly civil to them. Of course, Mademoiselle would not call with them, but I see the way quite clearly."

Mamma and I felt no doubt of it. Perkin kicked out one leg as if he had none either.

"But," said Mamma, "there's your brother. For a boy, education is of *practical* importance."

Perkin kicked out the other leg, but not this time to express conviction.

"Of course," Sylvia remarked, without the least concerning herself with him, "I was coming to that. He will have his own way to make."

"I," he observed, with a grin, "am the Heir Male of this estate."

"That," his sister declared, "is nonsense. If you were, and if the estate were four thousand instead of four hundred a year, you would have to be educated. In Monksbridge there are peculiar facilities. Mamma, have you heard of Abbot's School? No? I thought not. But you must have noticed some boys in red gowns going about in the town, and other boys with odd jackets. Yes; well, they belong to Abbot's School. It was founded by an Abbot of Marybridge, and he became a Cardinal——"

"A Cardinal!" cried Mamma, rather pained.

"Oh, it was in the fifteenth century!" Sylvia explained graciously. "There was no harm in it then; princes often were. In fact, this Cardinal was a cousin of King Henry III. And he liked boys" (Sylvia mentioned the fact as a pardonable idiosyncrasy in a semi-royal personage); "at least" (as though unwilling to do him an injustice), "he liked educating them. So he founded this school—and a college at Cambridge, I think, as well. It was for fifty-two boys at first, because there are fifty-two——"

"Cards in a pack," suggested Perkin.

"No; but perhaps because there are fifty-two *hounds* in a pack," Sylvia corrected, with some slight irritation, for she disliked interruption. "But when he was made Cardinal, he added seventy scholars in red gowns, and each of them can get into his college (at Cambridge or elsewhere) by passing a mere examination for nothing."

"You mean the examination is gratis?" Perkin asked coldly.

"No; but the University education. There is only twelve shillings a year to pay—in honour of the Twelve Apostles."

"That's an imposition; it ought only to be eleven," argued Perkin. "Judas hanged himself."

"My dear!" cried Mamma.

"He forgets," Sylvia observed, with calm superiority, "Matthias. Yes, and" (unanswerably) "St. Paul. St. Paul was quite an Apostle."

"But he makes thirteen," objected Perkin, averse from cordial interest in the Abbot's School.

"The shillings, however, are paid monthly," our sister explained.

"Twelve shillings a month make seven pounds four a year. I hope your accounts are not so groggy as your multiplication."

"'Groggy!' Perkin, dear!" Mamma expostulated.

Sylvia paid no attention to either of them. "There are," she reminded us, "but twelve months in the year, irrespective of the Apostles, and one shilling a month is all that the Abbot's Scholars pay. The Cardinal's, as the red ones are called, pay nothing. The education is excellent. I understand that numbers—certainly numbers; I believe nearly fifty—bishops have been educated there."

"And I," said Perkin, "firmly refuse to be a bishop."

"My dear, you are far too young," Mamma began; but Sylvia cut her short.

"I," she confessed, "would like a bishop in the family. Had dear papa lived and been educated at Abbot's School, he might have been one now."

"My dear, he is an angel," Mamma reminded her.

"Yes, Mamma; but he might, as I say, be 'My lord' at this moment. It is tiresome and foolish," our sister added, "that bishops' wives have no title. You, dear, would not have been 'My lady.'"

Perhaps this thought partly reconciled her to the loss of papa's bishopric; she left her musings and returned to the practical considerations from which she never strayed far.

"I merely mentioned the number of bishops the school has turned out," she went on. "It just shows the education is first-rate; and it costs nothing."

"And Perkin would live at home," our mother reminded herself with extreme satisfaction.

"Yes; at first," said Sylvia. "He could not begin as a Cardinal's Scholar. The Cardinal's Scholars are boarders. They are chosen out of the whole school as vacancies occur—by——"

"Death?" suggested Perkin, gloomily.

"Nonsense. Boys of that age do not die."

"What age?"

"Perkin dear," Mamma pleaded, "you shouldn't contradict your sister when she is arguing for your good."

"Mamma, I do not pay the slightest attention to anything he says." And this we all felt was strictly true. "The vacancies occur when one of the Gowners (they are called Gowners, I hear) goes up to Cambridge——"

"Or elsewhere," Perkin interposed.

"I am nearly sure it is Cambridge; or else it is Oxford, and that can make no difference. They go up, and then a vacancy occurs."

"Yes, dear, I understand," said Mamma, much pleased—Sylvia was always clear.

I think we all understood that Peterkin would go to Abbot's School. Sylvia had practically decided it, and our business was submission. It was all as she said: the school was an excellent one and it cost nothing.

"The grocer's sons go there," Perkin remarked in a disengaged manner, hoping against hope to hit in between a chink of Sylvia's armour. "Also the ironmonger's. Delightful boys, I hear. I shall bring them to tea."

"Like to like," our imperturbable sister responded; "I know that most of the boys are gentlemen. If you feel more at home with future grocers—but as to bringing them to tea, that will depend on Mamma."

"Everything," Perkin retorted, rising to leave the room, "does."

Sylvia smiled serenely, accepting the innuendo as a compliment and no flattery.

"All the Abbot's schoolboys," she said, as soon as the echo of the banged door had subsided, "must be residents of Monksbridge. Even Llanthamy boys are not eligible. Mrs. Travers came to live here on purpose, and her mother was Honourable. I look upon the school as one of the providential things about our getting Cross Place."

Sylvia had the shrewdest sense of Providence as applied to private life.

"And you know," she added, with her cool justice, "Peterkin is not dull. If others have become bishops, why not he?"

"I really *don't* think," Mamma confessed, "that he would like it. He only wore an apron once, and that was Susan's, to paint the arbour in. He spoilt it, and your papa had to give her three new ones."

"That is nonsense, dear. Peterkin would like six or seven thousand a year as much as anybody."

Neither Mamma nor I could say anything against this.

"If," she said weakly, "he could have the income without being a bishop——"

"Mamma!" Sylvia interposed. "In what other way can he hope to have anything like it for doing nothing?"

CHAPTER V

People who do not care to know what Monksbridge was like half a century ago, when we went to live there, had better skip most of this chapter. I cannot help trying to give some idea of it.

First of all, there was no railway station—on which fact the aristocratic Monksbridgers plumed themselves greatly. A branch line of a Welsh railway ran up to Llanthamy and ended there. It had been one of Sir Silas Monk's offences that he had brought anything so vulgar so near; indeed, the "loop" belonged, I think, to him. But over the river he had not prevailed to bring it, and Monksbridge triumphed.

For our part we never used the Llanthamy station, but, approaching our homes from the English side, left the train at Ruyton Abbas, five miles off, and came on in a "fly." There was an omnibus belonging to the Mitre, which also met trains, but the upper classes would not countenance it, because it also met those that arrived at Llanthamy station.

The drive from Ruyton was very pretty, through a rich, well-wooded country; the Llanthamy side of the river was treeless and bare, and the first view of the town was charming. The road ran down a long hill, with the park palings of Monkspark on each side, and over a Gothic (A.D. 1797) bridge connecting the two halves of Mr. de Braose's demesne, so that his deer could pass to and fro from one part to the other. Just outside the town the ground became suddenly flat, and out of the main stream of the Tham a branch, like a moat, circled the walls, and fell into the river again a quarter of a mile lower down. The walls were mostly ruinous, never having been re-built since their battering, during the Great Rebellion, by General Fairfax. But the gate tower was still standing and a long, slanting bridge ran up to it; in wet winters there was plenty of water under the bridge, but in summer only moist green meadowland. The mayor had the custody of the towngate keys, but for generations they had hung in the Corporation pew in the Priory Church. That pew was just outside the chancel, and over it, against one of the pillars, was an immense framed coat-of-arms, like a hatchment, representing the escutcheon of the borough—azure, a bridge, embattled, proper, with a crozier, or, in chief, to remind the townsfolk that it was to an Abbot of Marybridge that they owed their bridge. In front of the gallery was another shield, not quite so large, with the Royal Arms, as borne by George III. at his accession, quartering France, and with the Hanoverian quarterings on an in-escutcheon. Of course this was supported by a very ill-disposed-looking lion, and a unicorn whose mane wanted cutting. The tower of the Priory and the steep roof of the Guildhall could be seen over the town walls. The parish church was never called by any other name than that of the Priory, but we had another church, St. Thomas's, not dedicated to the Apostle, but to the great Archbishop of Canterbury. It was built "on royal ground," as Miss Belvoir told us, whether by Henry VI. or Henry III. she wasn't sure. As it was older than the Priory, it was probably built by Henry III.

The population of Monksbridge was not more than three thousand in our time, and we had three dissenting chapels—*Siloam* for the Primitive Methodists, *Ebenezer* for the Wesleyans, and *Pisgah* for the Independents—so that the huge Priory was big enough for all the church folk who went to church, and St. Thomas's had but a meagre congregation. However, the vicar was not badly off, for in pre-Reformation days a good deal of property had been bequeathed to it, out of devotion to the popular martyr, and, though Mr. de Braose had the great tithes, his ancestors had compounded, and the clergyman had about four hundred a year, and Becket's Close-House to live in.

From East Gate a winding street of very old houses led to the Guild Piece, which in any less ordinary town would have been called the Market Square—though it was of long, irregular, triangular shape. Here was the Priory, here was Abbot's School, here was Prior's House, and here were the best shops, none of them with ugly plate-glass shop-fronts. Abbot's School, a beautiful thirteenth-century building, stood back, with exquisite lawns before it, and part of the Guild Piece was a playground for the boys. Its later hall and chapel were said by some to resemble those of King's College in Cambridge, and to have had the same architect. From Guild Piece another irregular street led to English Gate and the river. Most, though not all, of the gentry lived in houses lying behind the main body of the little town, and had gardens running back to the old walls.

Our own garden and land had the walls for their northern boundary; Mayor's Fields bounded them eastward, and the river westward; a lodge and shrubbery asserted our dignity on the southern side, and just outside the lodge-gates was the beautiful fourteenth-century Cross, which gave our house its name. It was called Lamb's Cross and had a figure, carved in stone but much weather-worn, of the Lamb of God on one of its four sides.

The chapels, I have mentioned, were all in side streets, and eschewed the vanity of architectural attractions. Siloam looked like an elderly cottage without any chimney or garden; Ebenezer was built of a bilious drab brick, staring on the street out of two round windows, like sore eyes, edged with purplish-red brick, and astonished-looking eyebrows over them, excessively arched, of the same livid red. Pisgah had been an assembly rooms, and was bought a bargain when the Monksbridge aristocracy gave over assembling once a month to dance and play whist. Perhaps it was in allusion to its former uses that an inscription over the entrance adjured the public to "Put away the Accursed Thing." In Monksbridge there was no Catholic chapel—that was reserved for the generally inferior and illicit Llanthamy.

From the Priory a narrow street called Litany Row ran up towards the walls, joining a much wider road at a place known as Psalm Steps, whence a steep stone stairway still led up to a spacious turret on the wall, projecting from it on a sort of bracket; its sides were open, but the roof was supported on four Gothic arches.

Miss Belvoir told me that in Popish times the clergy and choir used to go in procession on Rogation days from the Priory, singing the Litany as they passed down the street of that name, and changing to a Psalm at the Steps; from the balcony-turret the Prior blessed the fields outside, hence the name of Blessing Tower that it still kept. On the landward face of the turret was a carved representation of a hand, raised as if in benediction, proceeding from a cloud.

When we returned Miss Belvoir's call we found her abode at English Gate as odd and interesting as we had expected. The stone staircase, narrow and spiral, was rather dark, lit only by slits in a wall four feet thick, but her drawing-room was huge and high, with a groined stone roof, and from the window the view down the river was really lovely. Her furniture was all old and perhaps a little shabby, still it suited the place better than smart new stuff would have done, and she had a good many family portraits that suited *her*. None of the originals could, I think, have been beautiful, but they had an air of importance, as if they had some right to have their portraits painted. Among them the handsomest was that of King Edward I., and Miss Belvoir explained that he also was an ancestor.

"We," said Sylvia, "are descended from Edward III."

"Ah! Edward I. was half a century earlier," observed our hostess.

"Yes," my sister agreed, but added ruthlessly: "If you're descended from Edward III. you must be descended from Edward I. too, and in *royal* descents the point is to be descended from as late a king as possible."

After this speech I doubt if Miss Belvoir was as fond of Sylvia as she had at first seemed inclined to be. It was to *me* she turned as she said with a tight little smile—

"As we both go back to the Hammer of the Scots we're cousins, my dear."

"How do you know," Mamma asked Sylvia afterwards, "that we're related to Edward III.? I never heard papa mention it, and he often talked of our connection with the Blicks of Blickling Court—a very important family in Norfolk, I think, or perhaps Yorkshire. Probably Yorkshire, for I know it was through a bishop, and he may have been Archbishop of York."

"Oh!" Sylvia replied coolly, "I don't suppose *you* are descended from Edward III.; it's an Auberon descent. I read it in a book of Uncle Stapleton's."

"But he," Mamma urged, "was not an Auberon. Anything but. He was never on terms with your dear father."

"No. The book was his; but it has a number of royal descents, and I saw one in which a John Auberon married a Howard of Corby, almost a Norfolk Howard." (Mamma, I did not know why, jumped visibly.) "All the Howards are descended from Edward III., and I've no doubt that John Auberon (it was spelled Oberon in the pedigree) was papa's ancestor. Dear papa's name was John, and Christian names always run in families."

"Well," Mamma said, "I think you were rather too severe with Miss Belvoir about Edward I. if your relationship to Edward III. isn't quite certain. I don't think she was pleased."

"No, of course not. I *meant* her to be snubbed. Miss Belvoir is a woman whom one must keep in her place. And *I* have *no* doubt about Edward III. Papa had at times quite the Plantagenet eye."

"I thought Miss Belvoir had the grand manner when she said we were cousins," I suggested pleasantly.

"You haven't the least idea," said Sylvia, "what it is. The grand manner is never heated. She was quite warm."

It was, I supposed, not in keeping with the grand manner for Miss Belvoir to beg *me* to come often to see her as we made our farewells—"if," she added, with a cool little smile, "your sister does not think it would interrupt your studies."

CHAPTER VI

At Island Court Sylvia made no allusion to Edward III.; indeed, she had not then discovered him, as we returned Mrs. de Braose's call before Miss Belvoir's. But I do not think she would have brought him in, in any case, for Sylvia had a wonderful instinct, and Mrs. de Braose would not have cared much for Edward III.

Sylvia had begged me not to try for wit, but she could be amusing in her own way, and she made Mrs. de Braose laugh more than once. As we were walking through the hothouses, the old lady said to me—

"Your sister is a genius. She has a genius for classes—I don't mean Sunday-school classes. The smallest shade doesn't escape her. Is she much older than you?"

"Twenty minutes," I confessed meekly.

"Dear! And one would say she had been 'out' for three years at least. Perhaps she has not lived lately with you——"

"Oh yes! She has never been away from us. But Sylvia is very clever."

"I see you're not; but I wouldn't mind, if I were you. The gods don't give us all the same gifts."

I blushed a little, and the sharp old woman noted it.

"You're not savage with me," she said, "for saying you were not clever like your sister? Not a bit; I see that."

"No," I said, getting redder, "but she *is* my sister; my twin, you know."

Mrs. de Braose pinched my arm. "You're no fool either," she whispered, for Sylvia was coming back to us; "and you were savage because you didn't think I was exactly praising her. I like that much better. Pins and needles are useful things, but pincushions don't care much for them. I'm not a pincushion, and Sylvia is uncommonly amusing. Don't you try to be pinny, though; only prick folk who say things you don't like about your own flesh and blood. You'll never be a Sylvia:—Miss Auberon, I can't believe you're twins; your sister is five years younger at least."

At seventeen Sylvia had no objection to being thought older than she was, and she smiled affectionately at me.

"Madge is our baby," she said. "Our brother is younger than us both, but he *really* comes between us two."

"I haven't seen him. Which is he like?"

"He isn't like either of us. There's a miniature at Cross Place that is just like him; it is the portrait of Lady Drumm, the mother of the Sir Stapleton you knew. It's odd how likenesses crop up again in families, for she is only our great-great-grandmother. But she has Peterkin's chocolate-brown eyes and hair and his cream complexion—to say nothing of his nose."

"Why," asked Mrs. de Braose, "are we to say nothing of his nose?"

"Least said soonest mended," my sister replied, smiling.

"Sylvia," Mamma protested mildly, "don't be unjust. Perkin has a beautiful mouth—such a sweet expression, Mrs. de Braose."

Sylvia looked up at young Mr. Eustace de Braose and smiled again. He was not the squire, but a much younger brother, and not more than one and twenty. He had lately been appointed *attaché* to the British Legation at Lisbon, where the Minister was Lord Chilmark, Mrs. de Braose's brother. He was as thin as his mother was fat, and about two feet taller; all the same he was like her, as she now remarked.

"Eustace is like me," she said, "or I was like him, forty years ago, but better looking. Do you still think you would like to live on an island, Miss Auberon, now you've seen mine?"

"It is prettier even than I expected, and much larger." And Sylvia went on praising it in detail, as, indeed, it deserved, but she said nothing about living on islands at present.

The house, built of grey stone, was very old, in the Tudor style, but had been restored by its present owner; it was raised well above the river, on terraces with stone balustrades, and was much more imposing than Cross Place, and about twice as big, though not large. The gardens were beautiful, as was our own, but they looked as if it would take a good many gardeners to keep them in order. A chronic boy, a man three days in the week, and Mrs. Auberon and her daughters looked after ours.

"Your sister has perfect taste," Mrs. de Braose said to me, very amiably, as we went along one of the river-walks. "She praises excellently; it's an art in itself. When I go anywhere I can only see the things that want altering—and it's hard not to mention them."

Sylvia was barely out of earshot, for though she walked with Mr. de Braose, she constantly paused to admire something, or to ask our hostess some question, and so we were never far behind, and never once out of sight. She held Mamma lightly by an arm, without leaning on it; so thus I had Mrs. de Braose to myself. When her son had moved on, Mamma had seemed about to fall back on us, and it was then that Sylvia, without pausing in the remark she was making, had just laid her hand behind Mamma's elbow, and taken her on with them. Whatever she said was divided between her two companions.

All this Mrs. de Braose observed, and she smiled a little, but quite approvingly.

"Your sister," she told me, "is an artist in tact. I cannot watch her without admiration."

All the same it seemed to me that she watched her too much.

"You put on a queer little look when I praise her," she said, giving my arm a pinch that did not hurt in the least. "I'm sure it's not because you're jealous."

"Of Sylvia?"

"No, my dear; I know all about it. It's because——"

"Yes, it is," I interrupted. "It's because I'm not sure I understand what you mean when you praise her."

"I admire her immensely. She is a lovely girl, and her manner is perfection; but I think perfection is thrown away on me. I ain't perfect, you know, and I can only do with a little perfection at a time. If there were a duke here, I'd marry him to her; only I'd be afraid she might meet an emperor afterwards and repent of the *mésalliance*. Now you're looking queer again. I've no tact, have I? I think what I've no business to, and say it all out."

As I thought she did, I said nothing, and she gave me another pinch.

"I like you, my dear, very much. And it amuses me that you won't like me."

"I should if——"

"If I'd leave Sylvia alone?"

"Yes. She's my twin, and——"

But, even if I had quite known what I wanted to say, I could not have said it, for Sylvia and the others turned back—or, rather, Sylvia stopped and half turned round, so that Mamma and Mr. de Braose had to stop too. They had been walking quicker than we could, for Mrs. de Braose was too fat for fast walking, and my sister seemed quite determined not to leave us behind.

"Why don't you young people move on," cried Mrs. de Braose, laughing, "and leave us elders to follow at our own pace?"

Mamma, who was about half the old lady's age, protested that *she* was an elder, but I think she smiled complacently at being counted among the young people. Mamma was still very pretty, and had quite as nice a figure as Sylvia's, and, though I thought it rather inconsistent of Mrs. de Braose, who had just declared that Sylvia looked so much older than me, to count me among the elders, it rather pleased me too.

"Madge," said my sister, reflectively, as if she had been considering the same question, "is our baby, and Peterkin is older than her in most ways, but I think it very clever of you, Mrs. de Braose, to count her among the elders. She was an old maid at ten."

She smiled on us both, and gave us both the same smile, friendly and a little patronizing. Somehow I felt that, in spite of her smile, she was not thoroughly pleased.

As we all went indoors, Mrs. de Braose and I were again a little behind the others, and she said—

" She snubbed us both, and you hadn't done a thing to deserve it."

Mrs. de Braose never whispered; she could say things in a voice that sounded quite loud without letting any one hear except the person to whom she meant to be confidential. I did not appreciate her fondness for being confidential to me, and was not a bit sure that I should like her; but, all the same, we became, as time went on, very intimate, and she seemed so determined to like *me,* that I could not help growing fond of her too, up to a point. All the same, I never became reconciled to a certain tone of hers when she talked of Sylvia, as she was never tired of doing.

What often struck me as strange, when we had been a little longer at Monksbridge, was that my sister, who at first had seemed specially pleased with Miss Belvoir and Mrs. de Braose, did not advance much in real intimacy with either of them; whereas I, who had not taken so much to them in the first instance, became fast friends with both.

CHAPTER VII

But, on the other hand, I, who had not been half so alert as Sylvia in discerning the joke afforded by Lord and Lady Monksbridge, and thought them merely a good-natured sort of elderly, wealthy people, at whom it was not a social duty to laugh, never became at all intimate with them; while my sister, in reasonable time, did grow into quite a marked intimacy with the Llanthamy Castle circle.

So little did Mamma or I foresee any such thing, that we both felt a little nervous as we drove for the first time to Llanthamy Castle. We were secretly half afraid lest Sylvia should quiz our host and hostess, or be "gracious" to an extent that they would perceive and resent.

"My dear," Mamma whispered, and I could hear her so plainly that I was glad to think that the wind must be blowing the sound away from the gorgeous coachman and footman high in the air behind my back —"my dear, I think it was very kind of Lord and Lady Monksbridge to ask us to luncheon and insist on sending their carriage for us."

"Kind?" said Sylvia, lifting her eyebrows coolly.

"Nice, I mean."

"Of course they could not propose sending a carriage without asking us to luncheon. Even *they* would understand that they could not offer to send a carriage for us to return their call—in."

Sylvia often paused before adding a final preposition, not being quite sure whether it were necessary or permissible, and Sylvia never did impermissible or needless things.

"Flys are very dear," Mamma observed meekly, anxious to avoid argument on a point she felt unable to understand like Sylvia; "and they smell so of stables with grooms in them."

"I should never have *dreamt* of returning their call in a fly," my sister observed, almost absent-mindedly, as people do when they hardly think a remark is worth answering at all, and without giving the least hint of what would have been her alternative. As Llanthamy Castle is three miles from the river we could not have rowed there.

"This," said Mamma, still in her dangerous whisper, "is their *best* carriage. I've seen Lady Monksbridge shopping (in a morning, I admit) in a much smaller one—a one-horse brougham, though it has a back seat."

"Of course," Sylvia declared, with perfect confidence, not so much in Lady Monksbridge as in ourselves, "she'd never have dreamt of sending that for *us.*"

Her tone distinctly implied: "She'd know better. I'd like to catch her at it."

All this made us rather nervous. It proclaimed such an unyielding spirit. If Sylvia chose to be formidable, who could stop her? Certainly neither Mamma nor I. And how would Lord and Lady Monksbridge like it?

But we had not yet half learned how clever she was.

She had certainly almost smiled openly as her eyes fell on the brilliant liveries, on the powder as deep almost as snow-drifts, and on the colossal coat-of-arms, supporters, and coronet, when she came out of our front door to get into the carriage, where Mamma and I were already seated—I, of course, with my back to the horses. And she took her place with so obvious a condescension that the tall young man holding the carriage door open for her had been instantly and permanently impressed. Mamma and I had not impressed him at all; he and the coachman had both looked as if they thoroughly understood that we had no carriage of our own; but after Sylvia had come down, they had the air of believing in innumerable splendid equipages of ours.

Sylvia smiled outright as we entered Llanthamy Park by a Gothic lodge, with a portcullis and an impracticable drawbridge.

"The trees," she remarked, scanning the extensive but new demesne, "have to be kept in cages lest they should run away altogether."

"Sylvia!" Mamma protested; but really her whisper was far more audible than Sylvia's low voice.

"They're not," I remarked wittily, "cages, but cradles—far more appropriate to infancy."

Sylvia continued to look about her without seeming to notice this sally, but presently recalled her interested gaze, and turned her pretty head gravely in my direction with a conjectural sort of look, as though I had asked what ninety-seven times eleven was, and she was vaguely wondering, or as if, without previous intimation of indisposition, I had broken a blood-vessel, and she were trying to imagine what I had done it for.

But if she thought of me, she did not speak of me.

"I suppose the trees will grow up," she said tolerantly, "and then it will *be* a park. The ground is well-shaped, and I think they were wrong to plant these single trees at all; little thickets, here and there, would have looked nice almost from the first, and would have been cover too. When there is as much ground as this"—she paused and looked round again—"six or eight hundred acres, I'm sure—trees don't matter much, especially when there's a lake like that; it is so curved, and lies in such a hollow that it must seem like a river in places; but very young trees, elms and oaks, have an uncomfortable effect—almost like a recitation, or one of Madge's leaps at wit."

The park was really not eight hundred, but a thousand, acres, and we were quite a long time before we came in sight of the house. Sylvia was, I saw, on the look-out for it.

"It is," she admitted, after considering it for several minutes, as it appeared in the distance, at the end of a long valley on a steepish rising ground, "really a castle, though a new one."

"You mean," I said, "that it is big." I remembered her original scorn of new castles, and also her recent allusion to my wit.

"A little castle is quite ridiculous," she remarked, not at all as noticing my critical tone, but merely as one obliging the public with facts.

"If all new castles are sins, the bigger the castle the bigger the sin," I observed with what I took for consistency. Nothing could show my inferiority in point of age to my sister more plainly than the fatal stand I was constantly taking on consistency.

"My dear," Mamma interposed, with pacific protest, "how can a castle be sinful?"

"Marjory is aiming at sprightliness," Sylvia explained coolly, and continued her survey of the huge pile in front of us. "At this distance," she observed, "it would not look new—if one did not know it. In this moist climate it will soon look old. I am afraid the gardens must seem rawer than the house—we shall see."

The road now ran along the valley, where there were no young trees, but only patches of gorse and bracken, and my sister slightly nodded her head in calm approval. You might have supposed that we were invited solely that Lord Monksbridge might be sustained by her favourable judgment. I had almost to pinch myself to remember that it was only fourteen weeks since we had heard of Cross Place being ours; Sylvia had the air of silently comparing Llanthamy Castle with all the ducal or baronial residences familiar to her from a distant childhood.

The road now turned a pretty sharp corner, and for some minutes we could not see the castle; at the next turning it came in full view again, standing high over a lake, edged with tall osmunda fern, in which all its towers were reflected.

"The site was chosen well," Sylvia informed us; "there was taste somewhere—perhaps it was the architect."

"The architect," I suggested, "was perhaps a peer of medieval creation."

Mamma's common sense rushed forward again with an olive branch in its beak.

"My dear, they are never people of title," she said, with a little frown. I quite understood that Sylvia's calm approval of Llanthamy Castle relieved her mind, and that she thought it behoved me to accept it in the same spirit. How awkward it would have been for us both had Sylvia been formidable!

The hill above the lake was too steep for a carriage-road, and we now turned away to the right, and another side of the castle was seen, presenting nearly as imposing a front as the other; at one end of it were a few inconsiderable ruins rising out of a thicket of ancient thorns.

"Ah!" said Sylvia, "I understand. There *was* a castle here, and the new one only carries on the old name. That makes a great difference." And she spoke as though removing a stain from the character of Lord Monksbridge. For a few moments she was silent; then, almost severely, she added, "Mrs. de Braose never mentioned that."

"Mrs. de Braose did not ask *you* to laugh at him," I reminded her; "she only wanted to do it herself."

"Your hat," Sylvia told me, "is crooked. There are heads on which *no* amount of pins will hold a hat straight."

The justice of this criticism I could not impeach, and I could only tug at my hat desperately.

"It was too much that way already," my sister remarked; "it will be back to front if you go on."

CHAPTER VIII

We had feared lest our Sylvia should be formidable or too crushingly gracious; but she was neither. At the huge entrance-door a butler and two more footmen received us; the footmen were deeply powdered, and the butler had no hair to speak of at all. All three had the air of receiving habitually, not angels unawares, but ducal personages, with full but unmoved knowledge of their rank. The manner of the footmen was stony, and that of the butler beef-and-port-winey; but in all these cases it expressed acquiescence in Sylvia, and toleration of us as belonging to her.

The outer hall was an armoury, and the inner hall looked like a cathedral into which a number of sheepish statues had lost their way without the monuments they belonged to.

Lord Monksbridge was visible at the choir-end of the cathedral, where the stalls and altar should have been, and he came a step or two to meet us.

"I was merely," he said, "crossing the hall, but am delighted that it happened at this moment."

Sylvia perfectly understood that he was in full remembrance of his Lord Lieutenancy, and that it would not be quite loyal to the Sovereign to let us suppose he had come forth to meet us; and by infection (I was always notoriously open to infection) I understood it too. Mamma, who was immune from infection, did not follow the workings of his mind in the least. It never dawned upon *her* that his little speech was a familiar formula, and that he was often discovered by expected guests in the hall. He did not really take us to the drawing-room himself, but merely joined the *cortège,* the butler still leading on, the footmen skirmishing on our flank. The drawing-room door was under an arched recess that should have led to a side-chapel, and the butler threw it open with the air of saying, "I can't help what's inside. You'll be disappointed, but it's not my fault."

Only Lady Monksbridge seemed to be inside; and she really did not seem enough. The room was as like the hall as a calf is like a cow, and far too big, and too Gothic; even the armchairs looked like episcopal thrones, and the footstools were prayerful. There were three enormous fireplaces, one at each end and one in the middle, and each of them had its cow and its goose, carved in white stone and supporting a carved shield that Goliath would have fallen under; over all was the coronet that would have fitted Giant Blunderbore's head. All the same it was a fine room, and the view through the windows was fine too.

Lady Monksbridge rustled forward—her silks were always too stiff and noisy—and a young man arose from a seat where he had been hidden behind her and also came to meet us. You could see in a moment he was her son, and he was like his father too; but he was very tall like Lady Monksbridge, and he was distinctly handsome, which my lord had given over being if he had ever begun.

It was the Lord Lieutenant who introduced Mr. Monk to my mother, and he was going to introduce him to Sylvia, but they smiled, and the young man said—

" We met yesterday—at Prior's House."

" Yes, you told me," said his mother. Sylvia had not told us; she had gone alone to Prior's House to explain how her headaches would prevent her from accepting the vicar's invitation to take a Sunday-school class, and had only mentioned on her return that she had promised I should take one instead. She had been away quite a long time.

" It would not do," she had explained, " to make a hurried visit when one went to refuse a favour."

" But you didn't. You offered up *me,*" I had reminded her.

" Oh," she pointed out, " it was *me* he wanted. Offering you instead *was* a refusal."

She and Mr. Monk were quite intimate; she was not a bit " gracious," but treated him as an equal, in spite of the cows and geese and coronets all over the place. And I suddenly thought I understood why she had criticized the park, and the castle, and the trees, with such unprejudiced, almost optimistic, candour. She admired the view, and both gentlemen led her to a window to see it better.

" What charming old gardens!" I heard her say. And I had never till then realized how clever my sister was; the gardens were really old, and the only things (except the ruins, invisible from the windows) about the place that were not new.

" Yes," said Mr. Monk, " they are old; when my grandfather bought this place there was a small country-house adjoining the ruins, and the gardens were here already."

" I merely extended and improved them," said my lord.

"To extend *and* improve," said Sylvia, a little graciously, "is harder than to create. It is," with grave decision, "a stronger test of taste."

Lord Monksbridge bowed quite meekly, and submitted, once and for all, to Sylvia's serene patronage. Mr. Monk looked a little amused, but no doubt he admired my sister. After all, one isn't one's father, especially when one has been to Eton and Christ Church, and Sylvia did not patronize *him*.

"I hope," Lady Monksbridge observed, "that the carriage came in good time. I said half-past twelve." Perhaps she thought that her lord had submitted too readily to my sister.

"Oh yes! It was so kind of you," said Mamma.

"Quite in time," said Sylvia; "I'm afraid I kept it waiting. I'm always late." (I stared, as this was rather a libel on herself.) "That's because we generally go about in flys, and it doesn't matter whether they wait or not."

I stared again; but my sister was much cleverer, need I say, than I, and Lady Monksbridge collapsed. She had very often to send carriages for us in the future, but she never again asked if they had arrived in good time.

Mr. Monk seemed again to be amused, but, perhaps, less pleased. I fancy he was fonder of his mother than of his father; still he evidently admired Sylvia's great social capacity.

"I wonder," said Lady Monksbridge, hastily, "if luncheon is ready?"

"They," said my lord, as if arguing a point, "will announce it when it is."

Mr. Monk looked less amusedly at ease, and began to talk to Sylvia as if carrying on some discussion of yesterday.

"Miss Auberon," he said to his father, "is an impregnable Tory. I tried for half an hour to convert her, but she is converting me."

Lord Monksbridge smiled, and looked as if he would not much mind the future peer being a Tory; *he* couldn't very well be converted himself, the geese and cows were too new.

"I never met a Radical before," my sister explained. "All my life I have been in the opposite camp."

Mamma, who knew as much about politics as I did, tried not to look surprised; but Lord and Lady Monksbridge understood at once that Sylvia had been bred up among the great Tory magnates of the land.

"It is," she added, "a question of tradition."

And a vista of long centuries of Toryism behind Miss Auberon caused our Liberal host and hostess to regard her with deepening respect.

At this moment luncheon was announced, and our further enlightenment as to Sylvia's hereditary politics was postponed. Crossing the cathedral we passed into a sort of chapter-house, octagonal as to its main portion, with a tall mullioned window in each of its sides; the lower portion of them was filled with plain glass, but the upper part was enriched with stained glass. There was the signing of Magna Charta, resembling a tablecloth; Cromwell removing the bauble; the Bill of Rights being passed, etc.

The stone walls were unpapered, and the groined roof had a pendent boss in the middle, on which, carved, painted, and gilded, were the Monksbridge arms, coronet and supporters. For the convenience of those who did not care to lie on their backs to admire them, these were repeated much larger over the fireplace, which stood back under a wide arch.

Lord Monksbridge said grace—to the butler and footmen, so to speak. And we began to eat and talk.

"I hope," said our hostess to Mamma, "that you like Monksbridge?"

"Oh yes; very much. We like it extremely."

"For a place of the kind there is a good deal of pleasant—ur—society," said my lord.

"It seems a friendly little place," Sylvia observed tolerantly, as if it would be unfair to expect *much* socially. Her placid grandeur made me giddy, and it acted on Mamma like an opiate; I am sure I saw her rub her eyes.

Sylvia turned to Mr. Monk. "There are little samples of different sorts of society," she told him. "That is rather amusing; we range down from dowager peeresses to dowager curatesses."

Our sister often availed herself of little sayings of Peterkin's when she thought them worth using; she was much too large-minded to deny herself a useful thing because it had originally belonged to a context she disapproved.

"You know Lady Llantwddwy?" said Lord Monksbridge. "She is quite *grande dame.*" He pronounced it as if he meant she were a certified grandmother.

"Oh yes; she called yesterday," Mamma was beginning; but Sylvia choked her off at the first syllable of "yesterday."

"She is an old family acquaintance," she remarked lightly, alluding no doubt to Lady Llantwddwy's having known Sir Stapleton. "Madge and I are the fourth generation of our family she has known."

As for me I was hungry, and minded my luncheon; Mamma always ate very little and Sylvia seemed to, but while she appeared to be only talking, she noted perfectly anything she thought good. She had a singular talent for guessing how it must be made, and she could teach our very cheap cook how to make it again.

"You have," said Lady Monksbridge to me, "a brother, I hear. I only heard yesterday." Then to Mamma, "You must excuse my not having invited him to come with you."

"Oh, Peterkin is a schoolboy," Sylvia explained; "he is at school at this moment. Abbot's School is one of the great advantages of Monksbridge for us."

"The education is good," Lord Monksbridge admitted, but with an air of reserve. The fact was, he much wished to have the school "reformed" by Parliament. But Mr. Monk did not want a speech on the necessity of such reforms, and chipped in rather hurriedly—

"If Peterkin likes fishing I would take him out with me," he said good-naturedly.

Mamma was much pleased, and I began to like Mr. Monk; Sylvia smiled, partly as though acknowledging a compliment to herself, and partly as though she thought Perkin had better mind his book.

"Hampden," said Lady Monksbridge, looking at her son admiringly, "fishes so beautifully. He always catches such a great many."

Mr. Monk had been called after John Hampden out of patriotism, not because of any family connection with the Earl of Buckinghamshire.

Thus began our acquaintance with the Monksbridge family, destined to ripen into a considerable intimacy. That the intimacy would follow I think I perceived even on that day, for Mr. Monk clearly wished it, and Sylvia was not opposed to him. Lord Monksbridge, too, evidently thought her (and us, for her sake) worth cultivating. Lady Monksbridge, perhaps, was less inclined to succumb to my sister and less satisfied to see her son's inclination that way; but she always did what he wanted, and by this time I was aware that a mere Lady Monksbridge had no chance at all against Sylvia.

CHAPTER IX

"WELL," asked Perkin that night, "did we sit on the lowly nobility of Llanthamy Castle?"

"Anything but," I assured him, with sprightly metaphor; "we were sweet as honey in the honeycomb."

Sylvia looked across the table with languid inattention that would not even feign interest.

"Of what," demanded our brother, "does the nobility consist?"

"Why," Sylvia suggested, "not say 'the quality'? We should know then in what circles you had culled your flowers of rhetoric."

"It consists," I told him, "of a papa and a mamma, and an heir apparent."

"My dear," pleaded Mamma, "I am sure Mr. Monk is very pleasant."

"Does Sylvia say he isn't?" asked Perkin.

"Anything but," I said again significantly.

"He wants you to fish with him," Mamma explained hastily.

"'He fishes beautifully,'" quoth I, and Sylvia smiled. She did not at that time at all object to my imitating Lady Monksbridge. Perkin was a little puzzled by us all.

"What's it mean?" he asked me afterwards in private. "Sylvia seemed to think these humble creatures were to be taught their place."

"Ah, but she hadn't seen it then."

"'Succumstances alters cases,'" said my vulgar brother, "as the railway guard remarked when he'd drunk the champagne and filled the bottles up with water."

"Still, I don't understand it," I confessed. "You know she has her principles——"

"As the lawyer said who'd boned the lady's interest."

"Did he? Well, she *has*. And I never thought she would abandon the '*family*' notion."

"'Blood' and that?"

"Yes. Of course these people are as rich as Crœsus. But, really, I thought she would not dispense with—'blood.' And I think she means us to be as thick as thieves with Llanthamy Castle."

"Well, if the fishing's good——"

"Sylvia doesn't care tuppence for fishing. It's Mr. Monk. You see, *he's* a gentleman. Not that I don't like his mother just as well myself; and Lord Monksbridge—he's not like Mr. Monk; but——"

"A good sort?"

"Yes. Only Sylvia would not care about that."

Sylvia never explained herself; she always took it for granted we would take *her* for granted. So, for a long time, I wondered (and perhaps Mamma did). But gradually we came to understand; and we, somehow or other, absorbed the idea that every one of any importance has a mission. It was Sylvia's to devote herself to a work. She did not consider teaching Sunday-schools, or carrying coal-tickets to stuffy old women, works at all suited to her genius; her genius was not parochial.

"That," she told Mamma, "might do for Madge. She will probably marry a rector."

"I," pleaded Mamma, "married a curate."

"Yes, dear, temporarily; but had papa lived he would have been an archdeacon: 'Archdeacon Auberon'—it sounds so natural. Madge's rector may be an archdeacon too—it would do for her very well; but my tastes are quite different. It is not everybody who really knows how to spend a large income; rich people are often so stupid that they might as well be poor. I should know exactly how to be rich; no income would be wasted in my hands. And rank—it is often thrown away; I hate waste. When I see some people with more money than they know what to do with, and with a position that they make ridiculous, I long to set them right. Of course one cannot marry everybody."

Mamma stared a little and murmured a timid acquiescence.

"You may marry my archdeacon if you like," I declared ungratefully.

"No. I should not care to be an archdeaconess."

"Nor should I."

"That," said my sister, whom no petulance ever moved, "is not the point. It is what you could do pretty well. I cannot marry all the rich people with titles that they seem awkward with; I wish I could. It would be worth the trouble."

"Lord Monksbridge," I observed pertly, "is married already."

"My dear," cried Mamma, "his son is grown up."

"Yes," said Sylvia, calmly, "he's married already; that's the pity. If he had married somebody else he might be five-and-twenty years nearer to what must now be put off to another generation. If Lady Monksbridge had been of any family, and clever——"

"I must say," interrupted Mamma, "I thought her embroidery beautiful. Are you *sure,* dear, she is not clever?"

"Quite," said Sylvia, with conviction. "An excellent woman, and respectable in every way."

"They seemed to *me* an attached couple," Mamma remarked, in her tentative manner, always ready to know herself wrong if Sylvia said so.

"Attached! Yes; but stupid. One as bad as the other. She can do nothing for him, and he can do nothing for her. If she had been a woman of family, and known what to do, their son would always have been thought of as *her* son, and passed for a man of family too. No one would have remembered Lord Monksbridge at all, except as Mr. Monk's father and Lady Monksbridge's husband; as it is, Mr. Monk has it all to do himself, and has *both* his parents on his back."

She paused and looked meditatively at her very pretty feet.

"One's duties," she remarked presently, "sometimes seem so clearly thrown in one's way."

"Ah, dear, your poor papa often said that. One need not, he said, go searching about for duties, they were to be found close at hand."

Sylvia always listened respectfully to Mamma's quotations of our father; she never thought of him as a hard-worked curate, but as the bishop he might have been had he been educated at Abbot's School, and lived longer.

"Papa had a very correct mind," she said, as though acknowledging his approval of her plans.

I do not think Mamma understood quite so soon as I did that it would be Sylvia's duty to rescue the Monksbridge title and wealth from absurdity and waste. But she liked going to Llanthamy Castle better than I did, and "took" to Lord and Lady Monksbridge much more, especially to Lady Monksbridge.

"I don't quite know," Mamma confided to me, "what Sylvia means by saying Lady Monksbridge is stupid. She and I get always on so well. I find her a friendly creature, and I'm sure Mr. Monk thinks her amusing—he often smiles at her speeches, and Sylvia says how clever he is. She has no pretence, and she told me she had been poor enough as a girl; her uncle, who left her all his great wealth at last, took no notice of her, and thought her plain and dull—'As I was,' she confessed, so simply. He used to snub her, and she did not enjoy staying at his big house a bit; he would invite the county people, and she never knew how to behave towards them. 'You're *my* niece,' he used to say, 'and I could buy half a dozen of them up. You should assert yourself; if you can't do the honours properly, you'd better stop away.' And he let her stop away a long time. But Lord Monksbridge and she had played together as children—of course he wasn't a lord then, nor was his father a baronet; but they played together, and one day they played at weddings, and his brother, who died, was clergyman, in a night-gown—over his clothes, of course—and he married them. And he said, 'It's done now; and mind you both stick to it.' And long afterwards, when the brother was dead, and Lord Monksbridge's father had been made a baronet, Lord Monksbridge (only he was not a lord yet) came to her and said, 'Joe said we were to stick to it, and I want to—will you?' She was five-and-twenty then, and not a bit good looking, she says; but she had never cared for anybody except him, and she thanked him. 'I suppose,' she told me, 'a young woman shouldn't thank a young fellow for sticking to it; but *I* did, for I was never clever enough to pretend different to what I felt, and I thanked him, and cried too.' So they were married, and when his father died she became my lady, and her uncle (who was a violent Radical, and had never married because Lady Julia Something would not have him) left her all his money. 'I was glad,' the good creature told me, 'for my husband's sake; he had plenty of his own, but I was glad, because I thought it so good of him to stick to it.' 'So it was,' I said; and then I saw how uncivil that sounded. But she didn't notice, and squeezed my hand, and I went on, 'I mean it was nice of him to be so faithful; but I'm sure he could not have done better.' 'Eh, I don't know,' she said. 'I was never cut out for a lord's wife; but it wasn't a lord I was thinking of when we married, and he says no one could suit him better. "In public," says he, "we have to live up to it; but I'd never be so comfortable in private without you. You belong to the old days, and all the rest of them are gone. Even Hampden don't belong to them. I have to live up to Hampden generally, but you and me are like a pair of old slippers."' That's what Lady Monksbridge told me yesterday, and I don't quite see why Sylvia calls her stupid. But perhaps you'd better not mention it. Sylvia is so clever herself; she is more particular than I am."

"No, Mamma, I shan't mention it; and I think Lady Monksbridge much nicer since you told me."

"Well, dear, we can't all be so clever as your sister, and sometimes I like a chat like this with you; not being clever, like Sylvia, you understand my feelings better."

"I don't think," I observed carelessly, "Sylvia would dislike your thinking Lady Monksbridge nice. She used to laugh when I imitated her, but now I don't think it amuses her. And I shall not imitate her any more."

"No, my dear, you should not do anything your sister doesn't like."

But when I said I would imitate Lady Monksbridge no more, I was not thinking of Sylvia. After Mamma's story of his "sticking to it," I found even Lord Monksbridge more interesting.

CHAPTER X

Peterkin liked being at Abbot's School from the very first, and no one could deny that Sylvia had been right in wanting him to go there. The education was really excellent, and Perkin got on quickly. He was not clever in Sylvia's way, but, in some other ways, he was much cleverer. When the Warden and Mrs. FitzSimon paid their second call, the Warden told Mamma that "Auberon" was likely to do well.

"Auberon has ability," he said in his large manner, "and he is not idle. He is quick and alert; his intelligence is above the average. Putting the average at, say, sixty (assuming the unit to be a hundred), I should rate his intelligence not lower than eighty."

Dear Mamma was delighted, and tried to look as if she understood about the unit and the average.

"Certainly eighty," the Warden continued, frowning, but not severely. "One may say eighty already. We may hope to be able to say ninety before long."

Mamma smiled again, and Mrs. FitzSimon looked as generously complacent as if her husband had invented Peterkin, and were making our family a present of him with her consent.

"Of course, when I say eighty," Dr. FitzSimon went on, "I am speaking all round. There are subjects in which one might put him, without rashness, at eighty-five, or say 84.55. History, *exempli gratiâ* —Auberon might one day distinguish himself in history. He has—to borrow the metaphor of the bowling-green—a bias towards history."

"And classics?" inquired Sylvia, who had an idea that bishops should be classical.

"In classics," said the Warden, not looking at Sylvia, and with the air of not at all admitting her right to talk as a parent, "in classics he may do well, too. It is early to say. There has been a defect of previous training. In classics previous training is of first-rate importance. I should rank it at ninety-five, or over."

"Ninety-five," said Mamma, gratefully, "is high for a boy of his age."

The slightest mention of any figures, even of a number, reduced her to imbecility. But the Doctor thought it rather pretty in a lady to be a little imbecile, and smiled indulgently.

"Auberon," he added to her, excluding Sylvia as much as possible, "may do well in classics. He has capacity, and taste; and he is not indolent. Without the spur of much emulation, he has an alertness that almost takes its place. I cannot perceive emulation in him—it stands low; twenty would be putting it high. A duller boy would be likely to feel the want of it. Emulation often saves the dull boy."

"Peterkin is not dull," observed Sylvia, judicially, "but he should have emulation. Without it, others may do as well as him."

I understood perfectly that she saw, in coldly disapproving imagination, "others" seizing Perkin's mitre.

"'As he,'" corrected the Warden. "That is true." But he still spoke with reserve, as if he resented two parents to one boy whose father was deceased.

"In mathematics," he proceeded, "Auberon is not incapable. He lacks no capacity in any of our branches." And the Warden, as he spoke of his branches, assumed a quite umbrageous look. "But in mathematics Auberon is not, as I hear, strongly interested. Mr. Pouncer, who presides over our mathematical branch, a Wrangler himself, does not report him as deeply interested."

"Mathematics," said Sylvia, calmly, "do not matter so much."

She had an idea that bishops need not be mathematical. Mamma looked as if she did not want Perkin to be a Wrangler, it had a truculent sound; but she only bowed, and adjusted the locket, with dear papa's miniature in it, on her chain bracelet, with a meek and wistful smile.

Dr. FitzSimon looked almost fiercely at Sylvia, and slowly removed his gold spectacles to do so with the greater emphasis—he was only generally aware of the public through them. It was impossible to look thus attentively at Sylvia without becoming aware that she was remarkably pretty—more than pretty; a girl with a quite uncommon share of refined and delicate beauty. Even Mrs. FitzSimon could see he was becoming reconciled to the adoption of his report by two female parents, and I think she condemned his weakness.

"And why," she inquired pursily, "do not mathematics matter so much?"

Of course Sylvia could not be expected to know (though she usually knew everything) that Mrs. FitzSimon had been a Miss Calculus, and that her father was not only Dean of Lambeth at that moment, but had owed his deanery to having been a Wrangler, like Mr. Pouncer.

"In my brother's career," Sylvia replied without hesitation, "they would not be of the least consequence. In diplomacy, mathematics do not matter at all."

She did not really for a moment intend that Perkin should be anything but a bishop; but she was determined to snub Mrs. FitzSimon, and the beginnings of diplomacy have more *éclat* than the tiresome preliminaries that even an Auberon has to go through before donning his mitre. The Warden was still absorbing the notion that Sylvia was the best-looking young lady he had seen for a long time, and he supported her instead of thinking of his duty as a husband. After all if *he* had not been able, while he still wished to do so, to snub Miss Auberon, it was ridiculous that Alicia should attempt it.

"No," he said, "in diplomacy it is more important to know that two and two make four than to be enamoured of logarithms."

Mrs. FitzSimon almost gasped. The Dean, her father, had written a book on logarithms. The Warden had written a book on the Digamma, and perhaps he felt that he should be a dean too. She half suspected him of it; or rather, she knew he meant to be a dean, and was tempted to think his impatience made him jealous. She was several years the Warden's junior, and it was a fact that her father had got his Deanery before he had quite reached Dr. FitzSimon's present age.

I was rather glad Sylvia had routed Mrs. FitzSimon; one naturally cares more for one's sister than for a woman who wears orange gloves and ribbons with a pansy-purple bonnet; and the Warden's wife had thin slate-coloured lips, and her nose was all nostril.

"I'm so very grateful," said Mamma, dimly conscious of electric conditions in the air, and changing her mind, as she often did, while speaking, as to the form of her speech, "that Peterkin is so satisfactory. It is so kind of you; and he is a dear good boy."

"For my part, I always like sons best," Mrs. FitzSimon remarked, not looking at me, "and I'm so glad all mine are boys."

"All Mamma's sons are boys too," said Sylvia, smiling straight into the irritated lady's eyes, "but she has only one; and it's all the more important he should do well. Under Dr. FitzSimon he is sure to. When we came here our first thought was of the great advantage it would be for him to be under him."

The Warden did not correct Sylvia's somewhat careless arrangement of her pronouns this time, but smiled as one who is resigned to being famous.

"You had heard of Abbot's School?" he said blandly.

"Of the Warden of Abbot's School;" and Sylvia turned her liquid eyes full on the Warden.

"Yes," said Mamma, "we heard that the Warden was a Doctor FitzSimon. I think Miss Belvoir told us."

Mrs. FitzSimon smiled remorselessly, and delivered herself of a rather belated repartee.

"As for one son being more important than several," she argued, "I don't see that. Where there are four or five they may *all* be unsatisfactory."

"There is not the least fear of my brother being unsatisfactory," said Sylvia, and her manner conveyed a perfect readiness to believe that Mrs. FitzSimon's five sons might all go astray. And the Warden took no notice; he was as much perverted parentally as conjugally.

"No," he declared, "Auberon will do well. A day may come when Abbot's School will be proud of him."

Mrs. FitzSimon rose to take leave, and the Warden, who liked his armchair and did not dislike looking at Miss Auberon, had to rise too.

"You are not forgetting, Alicia," he said blandly, "we must not forget, our little invitation," and he turned urbanely to Mamma.

Thus adjured, Mrs. FitzSimon, who, I think, had not wanted to remember, said—

"We came intending to ask if you would join us on Wednesday about nine o'clock; it is one of our social evenings. We do not give parties; they are merely social evenings. Would you and your party join us in our social evening at about nine o'clock on Wednesday next?"

At the first mention of "social evenings" she held forth her orange right hand to Mamma, at the second she bowed coldly towards a marble bust of Sir Stapleton that stood behind Sylvia, at the third she turned to me and smiled and nodded encouragingly. We were all to go.

"And Auberon," she added, "though young for our social evenings, bring him too. The Warden will be pleased to judge of him in private life. So far he has but viewed him from the Curule Chair."

"Perhaps," the doctor suggested, "not strictly 'Curule.'"

But Mrs. FitzSimon did not choose to take notice of the correction, and the Warden had not urged it loudly. As the moment of departure grew near he became meeker; walking home with her there would be no Miss Auberon to support him.

"Four of us!" said Mamma. "Four from one family will be quite an invasion."

"No, no!" cried the Warden, "pray let us see you all." And he did look at me, and tried not to look at Sylvia. "Pray let Auberon come."

CHAPTER XI

It was at Mrs. FitzSimon's social evening that we first saw Monksbridge in mass, so to speak. Hitherto, we had only seen it in detachments.

Warden's Lodge was a big house, and the drawing-room, dining-room, and library were all on one floor, opening into each other. They were large, and the drawing-room was, our hostess confessed, a noble apartment.

" Including the bay," she said, with so vast a manner that she might have been speaking of the Bay of Biscay, " it is forty-nine feet long."

" I should call it fifty," Sylvia remarked sympathetically; a big room always appealed to her best feelings. " It must be fifty including the wall."

" Forty-nine feet long," Mrs. FitzSimon persisted, who would accept no gifts from such a Greek, " and three and twenty broad. That, I understand, is a perfect proportion. And fifteen high. Papa always envies our rooms. There is none of this size in the Deanery."

Sylvia liked deans pretty well, but could not be subdued by them; she regarded them as a sort of addled bishops that had never hatched out.

Mrs. FitzSimon received Perkin half maternally, and more than half magisterially. She glanced at his shoes lest they might not be clean, and eyed his evening clothes as if she thought he would be sure to grow out of them, and an Eton jacket would have been better. All her five sons wore Eton jackets still (the eldest was a year older than Perkin), and their trousers were only pepper and salt, though she considered they looked black at night. But Peterkin was tall, and all her boys were "stubby." The Warden was stubby too, and his wife in critical moments was inclined to think it had gone against him; the Dean, like herself, was tall, and deans should, like footmen, be as tall as possible.

"Good evening, Auberon," she said, with encouraging condescension, poking the sticks of her fan into his hand. "You will find your friends further on—there is Richards Max. talking to Fitz Ma."

In public she always called her five by their school names, and they were Fitz Max., Fitz Ma., Fitz Mi., Fitz Min., and Fitz Quintus.

We all went further on.

There was the Vicar trying to convince Mrs. Hawthorn that she had not left her handkerchief at home, and Miss Hawthorn chatting provisionally with Fitz Max. till some one better should turn up. We were evidently not the only family that had "come four."

There was Miss Belvoir, in slate satin, and her Mechlin cap (over cherry-coloured sarcenet), smiling across the room at Mr. Rumble, the Vicar of St. Thomas's, who only smiled back, and would not come over to her, lest she should entangle him in reminiscences of pre-Hawthorn days, when she reigned at Prior's House. Mr. Rumble was ten years younger than Miss Belvoir, and she would not remember it, but insisted on his being a contemporary. At eight and thirty he felt himself quite youthful, and no one on earth thought Miss Belvoir young. He had a good deal of hair, and it had a natural curl, and his complexion, in which, as Miss Hawthorn said once, the York and Lancaster roses met, entitled him to feel younger even than he was. And Miss Rumble being a little older was an advantage. She spoke of him as " my young brother," to distinguish him from Mr. Stephen Rumble the lawyer, who didn't mind being fifty. Mr. Stephen Rumble was there too with his " bride." They had been married nearly four months, but Mrs. Rumble was still called " the bride " at Monksbridge, where marriages were rare events in genteel circles. She was the daughter of her husband's partner, and had four thousand pounds from her mother, and no brothers, so that in due time she would have all that Mr. Bloom had, including Castlegate House, one of the best in Monksbridge, excellently stocked with furniture, plate, and handsome old china; so that Mr. Stephen Rumble had done very well. And as Miss Bloom was not yet two and thirty, some people thought *she* might have done better; but then, some other people thought her hair more than auburn, and they remarked that she had a tongue, as of course we all have.

She looked extremely well in her white brocaded silk, with a green sash, a green scarf, and green jade ornaments. Her hair, red or no, was really beautiful, and her clothes were so well made and so well put on that Sylvia conceived a favourable opinion of her character, and promptly went over to talk to her.

Old Mr. Bloom was standing near, and he observed to the Baroness that those two young ladies made a striking couple. The Baroness had rather a liking for widowers, and Mr. Bloom was still a fine-looking man, tall, upright, and lean, with well-cut white hair, and a bright ruddy complexion. He had not married till he was over forty, and he was over seventy now, but he scarcely looked more than sixty. The Baroness was not quite sixty, but her spareness was of a different sort, and in evening dress she gave a bony impression. Her grey hair, not by any means white, was still abundant, so she wore it in what Monksbridge called "Marry Antoinette fashion." She also wore diamonds, and her black silk was relieved by a quantity of fine creamy lace. Her hands had always been beautiful and were so still, though now too lean.

"Yes," she agreed, "I never saw Eleanor look so well; she knows how to dress. That peculiar shade of green goes perfectly with her hair, so does the white brocade; and she was quite right to relieve it with the green. Jade-green is not a common colour, and it was quite clever of her to get hold of it. Are the jade ornaments an old family possession?"

The Baroness knew that the Blooms had owned Castlegate House for several generations, and had always had good things.

"Well, not exactly an heirloom; but a gran' uncle of mine was an admiral and brought them home from the East as a present for his sister-in-law, my grandmother. Eleanor unearthed them, and I gave them to her at once, but I don't remember her wearing them before. But, Baroness, most people would say that Miss Auberon takes the shine out of Eleanor."

"Not in the least. They could never clash. Of course she's a lovely girl, but any one would say she was one and twenty; and she manages them all too much for her age. Her mother daren't say 'Bo!' to her."

"I thought it was a goose one had to say 'Bo!' to."

"She's anything but that. A little cleverer than is necessary, I think. In my young days we weren't supposed to let any one suspect we were clever till we were married."

"If I had known you in your teens *I* should have suspected it."

"Ah, but you're a lawyer, and naturally suspicious," laughed the Baroness. Thus these old persons flirted placidly and enjoyed themselves very well.

Mr. Bloom had no general leaning to widows, as the Baroness had to widowers, but he rather liked his old neighbour, and he was fond of people one knew all about; he knew that the Baroness's family was one of the best in Wales, not rich, but respectable and well-behaved, with an hereditary habit of solvency and decency. He was a fierce old Tory, and utterly abominated the Llanthamy Castle splendours, though he did not make fun of Lord Monksbridge like Mrs. de Braose. Messrs. Bloom and Rumble managed all the de Braose estates, as the firm had done for several generations. They also managed the "Town" property, and Mr. Bloom, like Mr. Rumble's father, was Town Clerk; at election times Bloom and Rumble were always the Conservative agents, as Stiff and Pusher were the Liberal agents. Stiff and Pusher's offices were in Llanthamy, and they managed for Lord Monksbridge. Old Mr. Stiff was a Dissenter, and young Mr. Pusher was known to disbelieve in the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Neither of them was ever invited to Mrs. FitzSimon's social evenings—in fact, Mr. Pusher had only one child, a plain little girl with a nursery governess, and though Mr. Stiff had three daughters, they were obviously ineligible to be Abbot's Scholars; also they were "getting on," the youngest of them fifteen years older than Fitz Max.

CHAPTER XII

The arrival of two young men, hitherto unseen at Mrs. FitzSimon's social evenings, caused almost a sensation. She hoped it would be believed she had expected both of them, but neither had actually been invited.

"Mrs. FitzSimon," said Mr. Eustace de Braose, as he shook hands, "I hope you will not think me very forward; but I found out you had a social evening on Wednesdays."

"On the first, third, and fifth Wednesdays," his hostess corrected mildly—"when there is a fifth Wednesday."

"There should always be a fifth Wednesday," declared the youthful diplomatist. "And, as I am an old boy, I thought I might come."

He did not look like what is generally called an old boy; but Mrs. FitzSimon understood, and smiled urbanely. For three months before going to Eton, he had been "coached" by the Warden in dignified seclusion.

"And I," said Mr. Monk, "was dining at Island Court. When he said he was coming on here, I refused to be left behind, and determined to throw myself on your hospitality."

Mrs. FitzSimon was not a Liberal; it was a Tory Premier that had recognized the claims of her papa's logarithms to a deanery, but she thought well of honourables, and handsome young men can never be out of place at a party—not that her social evenings were parties.

"Oh!" she said, "no invitation was necessary. We do not invite; we merely intimate—and our friends supervene. Wednesday arrives (the first, third, and fifth Wednesdays) and our rooms fill au-to-mat-i-call-y. Pray do not speak of not being invited, but consider yourselves as arriving——"

"Au-to-mat-i-call-y," a voice was heard to murmur. It really was not Sylvia's; but Mrs. Stephen Rumble was standing so close to my sister that I was not surprised to see our hostess dart a vindictive look at the Miss Auberon she did not like. And Sylvia did smile at that precise moment.

As their hostess shot her quick glance at Sylvia, the young men's eyes naturally followed hers, and presently Mr. de Braose and his friend moved on to greet my sister. I think Mrs. FitzSimon suspected why they had come; but they *had* come, and their presence gave, she told herself, a *cachet* to the social evening. She often used French expressions to herself, and understood what they meant quite as well as a Frenchman would have done.

Sylvia did not monopolize the young men, but firmly handed on Mr. de Braose to Mrs. Stephen Rumble. She could not hand them both on, and simply kept the one whose mother would least have grudged him to her. That Mr. Eustace de Braose admired her my sister had perceived at their first meeting, but she had also begun to doubt on that same occasion whether his mother thoroughly appreciated her. An *attaché* and a younger son, she thought, should not be encouraged by people whom his parents and guardians regard critically. Probably he owed most of his income to his mother's generosity and affection; that gave her rights which Sylvia's calm justice fully recognized. And there was no call of duty to set her in opposition to Mr. de Braose's mother. Sylvia knew she could do nothing for the de Braoses, whereas her unerring instinct told her she could do a great deal for the Llanthamy family. To do it might be her duty; not that she was sure yet, for some higher duty might appear in her path.

So she returned the greetings of both these young men with perfect friendliness, and handed Mr. Eustace de Braose on to Mrs. Stephen Rumble. She did not hand Mr. Monk on to anybody, but it must not be supposed that she had welcomed him in any specially interested manner. She knew him quite well by that time, and had only met Mr. de Braose once or twice, but she received them both with the same calm goodwill.

Mrs. FitzSimon watched, greedily, prepared to accuse her of flirting; but that was because she did not in the least know Sylvia, who never flirted. Old Mr. Bloom and the Baroness in their corner by the piano might be flirting, but nothing could be less like it than Sylvia's calm and public friendliness out almost in the middle of the room. When the Warden came up to welcome Mr. Monk, it was quite plain that she did not in the least consider it an interruption.

"Were you surprised to see me?" Mr. Monk had been asking her, with a little smile.

"You said yesterday," she answered, without smiling, "that you knew the Warden and Mrs. FitzSimon very little."

"Yes; but it struck me that it was a duty to know them better. When Eustace de Braose said he was coming here, I determined to do my duty at once. The performance of duties should never be postponed."

"No," said Sylvia, gravely, quite ignoring the fact that he smiled again, "when one is sure anything *is* a duty."

She spoke thoughtfully, thinking more of herself than of Mr. Monk. Then the Warden came up, and Mr. Monk talked no more of his duty as connected with his presence there.

"We shall have some music presently," the Warden promised them. "That is Mrs. Stephen Rumble's harp. A beautiful and scriptural instrument."

Sylvia glanced at the harp, as though to see in what respect it looked scriptural.

"It's very pretty," she said. ("Her arms are good, and I think she is quite right to play the harp.") But this she did not say aloud.

"And you, will you sing?" inquired the Warden. "I am sure you sing."

"No; I do not sing. I have no accomplishments. I can do nothing of the kind."

"Ah! that is what ladies always say. Mr. Monk, are you not sure that Miss Auberon sings?"

"Warden!" Mrs. FitzSimon whispered loudly at his elbow. "The Baroness has had no coffee——"

"My dear, I thought Mr. Bloom——" said the guilty Doctor, with an ill-repressed little jump.

"No, no; the Baroness will expect *you* to take her to coffee. I will tell Mr. Bloom to attend to Mrs. Hawthorn."

So the Warden was piloted away, and Mr. Monk suggested taking Sylvia to coffee.

"No, thank you, I do not like it," she said in her calm, decisive way. "But Mamma likes it. Perhaps you would take her. I should like to ask Miss Belvoir how she is—if you will take Mamma."

And my sister left him to his duty, while she went cheerfully to hers. Mr. de Braose was just proposing coffee to Mrs. Stephen Rumble, and Sylvia saw them move off together.

"He evidently admires red hair," she said to herself; "and hers is quite a rare shade. With those jade-green scarves and sashes she looks wonderfully well; I'm glad she was with me. I wonder why she married that podgy lawyer?"

"I say, Madge," Perkin said in my ear, "come and have some coffee."

I saw the Vicar of St. Thomas's wavering down on me, and accepted my brother's offer promptly. For all I knew, the Rev. William Rumble might be an archdeacon in embryo.

"Sylvia looks unkimmon, don't you think?" Perkin observed as we went. "We are," he added, as we passed a long mirror, "a goodish-looking lot."

"Who? You and Sylvia?" asked I.

"And Mamma. She's better-looking than anybody here, except Sylvia."

"How about Mrs. Stephen Rumble?"

"Oh! I don't care for carrots. Why, *you're* better-looking than she is." And that was all the compliment I got for my fishing.

CHAPTER XIII

" So," said Lady Llantwddwy, "you were out in society last night?"

We were lunching with her at Little Park, and she liked to hear all the local gossip. Little Park is in Monksbridge, but neither the mother nor the aunt of the reigning Mr. de Braose were ever to be seen at Monksbridge parties, though they had a bowing acquaintance with all the genteel Monksbridgians, and called on most of them annually or quasi-annually.

With the Vicar and the Warden they dined once every winter, and Mr. and Mrs. Hawthorn and Doctor and Mrs. FitzSimon would dine at Little Park and Island Court twice or thrice in a year.

" So," said Lady Llantwddwy, " you were out in society last night? "

" In or out? " said Sylvia, laughing a little; she knew her company perfectly. Lady Llantwddwy was a much simpler person than Mrs. de Braose.

" It was quite a party," said Mamma, " though Mrs. FitzSimon insists they are only social evenings."

" What *is* a social evening? Did they play Dumb Crambo or sing glees?" asked Lady Llantwddwy, with smiling curiosity.

" Miss Hawthorn played something," Mamma explained, " but I don't know if it was called Dumb Crambo; it *was* Italian music, I think. There were no glees, only a duet."

"We didn't do anything in particular," said Sylvia; "we merely behaved ourselves."

"Beautifully, I'm sure," said the old Viscountess, quite delighted. "What a good thing Maria doesn't go" (Maria was Mrs. de Braose of Island Court); "she never can behave herself. And Eustace was there. Did *he* behave pretty?"

"Perfectly," said Sylvia, who had discerned a slightly increased touch of curiosity in the old lady. "He won golden opinions from everybody. Mr. Stephen Rumble looked as if he didn't know whether to be most flattered or jealous."

"Hi, hi!" squeaked the Viscountess, enraptured. "An *attaché* at a Monksbridge 'Evening'! Mrs. Rumble! That's the Miss Bloom with brilliant hair. I remember her mother, a nice woman, in Bright's disease; very decent people, of course. And the bridegroom was jealous! I must tell Edgar." (Edgar was the reigning Mr. de Braose.) "If it was election time he would have to look out, or his young brother would be coming in for Monksbridge over his head."

Though the old lady talked with such animation she never neglected her luncheon; fat Mrs. de Braose ate like a sparrow, thin Lady Llantwddwy ate like an ostrich. The sisters-in-law, as they called themselves, were not in any way alike. Mrs. de Braose had a handsome and clever face, and carried her short, almost round, body with such dignity that anywhere she would be imposing. Her skin and complexion had always been fine, and she was proud of her abundant brown hair, almost untinged with grey, and of her beautiful hands. The Viscountess was tall, but had no figure; she had a bad way of walking, with a short run and a half turn, as if she was never quite sure where she meant to go, and her long head was generally craned out in front of her, as she peered out of her near-sighted pale-grey eyes. She dressed rather badly, and wore no cap on her scanty drab hair; her face was also drab, and her hands were rheumatic. She was a plain, awkward woman, but all the same you could, Sylvia said, see that she was somebody.

Little Park was a good deal larger than Island Court, the present house dating from Charles II.'s time when an older Tudor house had been burned down; the rooms were big and lofty, lined with brocaded silk, on which hung large and fine portraits by Lely, Kneller, Gainsborough, Reynolds, and Sir Thomas Lawrence. There really was a small park of over fifty acres, long and narrow, with the town walls on one side, and a very high stone wall, as old as the present house, on the inner or town side; and there were deer in it, whose ancestors had been brought from Monkspark. A screen of tall cedars hid the house from the road, from which one entered the park through a splendid pair of old French wrought-iron gates, hung on " rustic " stone pillars of the Inigo Jones type. Opposite these gates was the top end of Priory Gate, the quaint, irregular street that curved down to the Guild Piece.

Little Park was altogether a grander place than Island Court, though not, perhaps, so pretty, and without any lovely river view, and I could not help wondering whether, if Lady Llantwddwy had lived in a modern street, and been called Mrs. Somebody, Sylvia would have been sure that she looked like Anybody.

" Your party seems to have been entertaining," Lady

Llantwddwy declared, helping herself hastily to another *quenelle* as if she was stealing it. "Of course, I don't go out at night——not to parties. I should never dare to tell Evans that I wanted the carriage to take me to Warden's Lodge if it was not to dine there. He lets me dine at Monkspark as often as I like, and at the Duke's. But then it's nine miles to Castle Peovor; a coachman never minds going out at night to drive nine miles. He doesn't cordially approve even of my dining at Prior's House or Warden's Lodge, and I haven't courage to do it more than once in a winter. You see, it's dull going half a mile and coming home again to put the horses up, and then having to put them in again at quarter-past ten. I wish he'd put them up at the Mitre, as my nephew does. I dare say he would, only he don't like Edgar's coachman. Evans was with *us* at Monkspark, and one never likes one's successor. But you certainly seem to have had all sorts of fun. And who," the old lady asked, with a sudden pounce on me, "came to the party to see *you?*"

This remark quite puzzled Mamma, but Sylvia, I could see, understood it very well, and was not particularly pleased.

"Mr. William Rumble asked me if I did not think my sister would like some coffee," she said, laughing, "but I don't know whether he came on purpose."

"Hi, hi! Mr. William Rumble! That's the Vicar of St. Thomas's. And I hope, my dear, you enjoyed the coffee?"

"Yes, only Perkin jogged my elbow and spilled half of it over Miss Hawthorn's train."

"Brothers should not be too near sisters at parties," said her ladyship.

"It was Perkin who gave me the coffee, and he gave me another cup."

"And what," inquired the old lady, for whose curiosity nothing was too insignificant, "and what did Miss Hawthorn say?"

"She never knew. Perkin got me another cup, and then fetched her pound-cake and talked to her. He made her eat three pieces. And when she'd done, I had gone off."

"With Mr. William Rumble, I hope."

"No; by myself. I went to listen to the musical-box playing 'Allan Water.'"

"You managed badly: so did Perkin. But he managed better than you. I've no doubt Mr. William Rumble did come on purpose. And Becket's Close is a pretty sort of place. Mrs. Auberon, I'm afraid you're a bad chaperon. Those Rumbles have a way of getting on—an uncle of this young parson's became a bishop somewhere—in Canada or New Zealand, I think; and he married very well—one of Lord St. Kevin's five daughters. You know the St. Kevins always have crowds of daughters. You are not to think of the Rumbles as just country lawyers. I've heard my husband say (Mr. de Braose) that the family came from France, and was really de Rambouillet; not at the Revolution, but at the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. They were Huguenots, I suppose. Anyway, they dropped the 'de,' and the name got changed into Rumble."

Sylvia was thoroughly interested. "I think," she said, "it was stupid of the uncle to have his bishopric in Canada or New Zealand——"

" Now I think of it, it was Mauritius," Lady Llantwddwy remembered.

" Or Mauritius," Sylvia went on. " There's not much use being a bishop in those sort of places. If he could get made a bishop at all, he should have taken more pains and got some diocese at home."

All the same it was clear that she thought more of Mr. William Rumble now, and it would not be fair to blame *him* for his uncle's defective perseverance.

" And," she said, " I don't see why they dropped the ' de,' and let their name be corrupted into Rumble."

She was so seriously interested that I almost trembled. What if she thought my duty pointed towards the Vicar of St. Thomas's? Our hostess was amused, and she said to Mamma—

" I am afraid you are a bad chaperon. Miss Auberon would be much better."

Lady Llantwddwy did not look clever, but she was sharp enough; and Sylvia, who was much cleverer, was not without a certain simplicity. Genius is often clear, like other great things, such as the atmosphere.

PART II

CHAPTER XIV

PETERKIN did very well at Abbot's School, and I think we were all a little surprised. He gained a number of prizes, and his reports every half-year were more than satisfactory. All the masters spoke of his capacity, and there was never any complaint of his industry. The truth was, he was a great deal cleverer than Sylvia or any of us had imagined, and he *liked* learning. I dare say he would have been idle enough had the things he had to learn bored him. The Warden had said he lacked emulation, by which I suppose he meant that Perkin was not eager to do well for the sake of being better than other boys; but he did better than them because he was cleverer; and what some of them only learned because they had to, he learned because he was interested in the things for their own sake.

To me he was very good-natured, and I may say that almost all the education I ever had I got from him.

A year after entering the school there was a vacancy among the Cardinal's Scholars, and Perkin "won the gown," as they called it, passing the examination with such distinction that the Warden paid Mamma a special visit of congratulation. Sylvia was out, and the Doctor spoke so highly of Perkin that Mamma quite broke down, and cried over the

Warden's podgy hand, which at the moment seemed to her as beautiful as anybody's feet on the mountains.

" I am so thankful," she wept. " He is a dear boy; but so light-hearted."

" Not at all light-*headed,* ma'am," said the Doctor. " His head is well furnished."

" Yes. I knew he was capable. But I couldn't tell whether he would apply . . . he is easy-going, and I feared he might take things too easily."

The real truth was that Mamma could only see through Sylvia's eyes, and had never guessed that Perkin was an unusually clever boy. She thought highly of us all, because we were her children, and still more because we were papa's, and because it was impossible for her not to have a high opinion of those she loved. But it was only Sylvia whom she supposed *every* one must recognize was clever. The great difference was that Sylvia took herself very seriously, and Perkin did not take himself seriously at all. His special charm was that he never seemed to be thinking of himself, and this quality made him very popular at school. Even the Doctor spoke of it.

" Auberon," he said, " does easily what many can only do with tedious effort. Fortunately they are the very things it is his present business to do. He has got on rapidly; the progress he has made in a single year is quite unusual. He will certainly do notable credit to Abbot's School. And he will make no one jealous; for I have pleasure in saying that he is a boy of a sweet disposition whom all are fond of. He is brilliant and not vain; there is no sign of conceit about him. Masters often regard brilliant lads doubtfully, because they are apt to think too well of themselves.

Auberon, they all say, never betrays the least appearance of thinking of himself at all; and that is why he is so well liked by his school fellows—boys hate a conceited boy. And he is manly, cheerful, and, as you say, light-hearted, and first-rate at games—without that his capacity would make him few friends."

"I wish," Mamma said, "that Sylvia was here." I wasn't sure that I did, for though it would do her good to hear all these praises of Perkin, I felt that the Warden, with only Mamma to talk to, was at his best. Perhaps he would never have become fond of "Auberon" had Auberon been a dull or even average boy, in spite of all his sweetness of disposition; but Perkin, he found, was not an average boy, and the Doctor fully expected that Abbot's School would have occasion to be proud of him. So that the qualities which really did exist in my brother the Warden was able to perceive. And he was a friendly man, glad to bring good news, and a little touched by this pretty widow's grateful emotion.

"Ah, how kindly you speak!" she said. "How much we owe to you! It was Sylvia's idea; she is always right. It was she who saw at once what a chance it would be for poor Perkin to enter Abbot's School under you."

"Well, well," said the Doctor, not repudiating such honest praise, "we have all done our part—each in his Own Branch. And latterly, Auberon *has* been peculiarly my own charge. Not perhaps in History, and Auberon's strongest bent is History; but Mr. Furnival, in whose Branch History lies, is most highly qualified to Preside *over* that Branch. But what would History be without Classics? And Classics are my

Own Branch. History is very well; but it will be by Classical Distinction that Auberon will become—er—Distinguished."

"Classics," Mamma murmured, "are so very gentlemanly."

"With*out* Classics," the Warden explained, laying a heavy emphasis on *out*, "the English Conception of the Finished Gentleman can hardly be—ur—conceived. But, with that distinction in Classics that I foresee for Auberon, it will be a question of—ur—More."

He paused a moment, because a hair was tickling his left ear, and it almost seemed to Mamma as though he were thinking of Sir Thomas More.

"More?" she queried.

"Yes; more than the mere Finished Gentleman——"

"I did not know," said Mamma, with vague readiness for distinctions accruing to her family, "that they gave peerages for Classics. I know that my dear husband's friend, Mr. Wing, of Oriel College, I think (no, that was Mr. Burkett, who went over to Rome when engaged to Clara Simmonds, and became a monk), of Balliol College—yes, Balliol—edited a Greek play. (Was it Livy, Marjory? But you would not know; it was before your dear father and I were married.) And he became a Baronet, Sir James Wing, of Wingdam, or Wingblow, a very fine place in Norfolk, called after some place in Holland where the family came from. But I thought he had inherited it from an uncle. No doubt, however, you are right, and it was for the Greek play they made poor Mr. Wing a baronet. (He was very plain, and had a silver roof to his mouth.) But things move so rapidly nowadays;

I dare say a peerage would be the thing now. And Sylvia would like that——"

"My dear madam," the Warden was able to interpose, Mamma having lost her vinaigrette in the chintz of the sofa, and suddenly stopping to make plunges for it. "I alluded to the Distinctions of the Schools. To Aca-Dem-Ic Honours."

He became syllabic, partly to emphasize his lofty point, and partly because dear Mamma, in thrusting about for the vinaigrette, had encountered a latent crochet-needle, which she, convinced it was a wasp, declared had stung her.

"They are so crawly at this time of year," she complained. "Oh! it's that crochet-needle that I told you, Marjory, I was sure Hannah had borrowed. I am sure she *did,* too; and it was very crafty of her to hide it like that, and dangerous too; it might just as well have run into an artery."

Under cover of this diversion the Warden, who had gallantly risen to kill the wasp, took his leave.

"Academic Honours," were his last words. "Academic Honours are what I foresee for Auberon."

But Mamma, I think, never relinquished the idea that a title was in store for Peterkin; the credit of which she, however, would always largely attribute to Sylvia.

CHAPTER XV

We knew nobody in Llanthamy and there was nothing to take us there. Our shops were all in Monksbridge, and indeed no Monksbridge lady would have confessed to wearing anything bought over the water, though we understood that everything was cheaper there. Even in going to Llanthamy Castle we did not drive through the town from which it took its name, for the town ran along the river to the left of the bridge, and the road to the castle turned sharply to the right.

But a few months after Perkin got his gown we found that he had made some friends in Llanthamy. The Cardinal's Boys lived " in College " and he was at home to sleep only in the holidays, so that, though he was often in and out, we saw much less of him. He was no longer with us at meal-times, or at night, and I missed him a good deal. No Llanthamy boys were eligible for Abbot's School, but one day Perkin told us that the Llanthamy High School had challenged Abbot's to play them at cricket, and that there was some discussion as to whether the challenge should be accepted or refused. There was a lofty feeling among many of the Abbotites that the presumption of the Llanthamists should be coldly snubbed.

The High School was not yet twenty years old, and Abbot's, it was urged, should assert its dignity. Sylvia sympathized with this view, but Perkin laughed at it.

" They play all the best schools in the two counties," he said, " and lick some of the best. They've a good eleven, and we'd better show them that ours isn't afraid of it."

And Perkin, whose voice was now weighty at Abbot's, carried the day there. When Lord Monksbridge heard of this from Mamma, he spoke very handsomely of her boy's " manly common sense," and she, who had agreed, naturally, with Sylvia, began to feel sure that she had been on Perkin's side all along. Lord Monksbridge was a founder and visitor of Llanthamy High School, and always had a certain jealousy of Abbot's, which called for drastic reform, whereas the High School had been born reformed. It was free from sectarian tests, while all Abbotites had to be members of the Church of England. Among the things he wished to reform at Abbot's were the Exhibitions, of which Perkin gained one only four months after getting his gown. These Exhibitions were a sort of scholarship, and took the form of little annuities for two, three, four, and five years, or of considerable money-prizes not continued annually. The education was already free, but an Abbot Humphry Exhibitioner had eighty pounds a year for five years, or for as long as he remained at school, and for three years afterwards if he went up to Cardinal's College; an Abbot Watkin Exhibitioner had fifty pounds a year for three years, and so on. What Perkin gained was the Cardinal's Prize of Sixty-Seven Pounds, the founder of it having been sixty-seven years old at the time of its institution; it was only given once in three years.

Lord Monksbridge argued that all this showed the school to be too well off. Dr. FitzSimon might be a very good man, but twelve hundred a year was by far too much for him.

Lord Monksbridge was pleased with Perkin; all the same he thought he would like to reform Abbot's, and would have certainly made it his own particular business if he had been a younger man. Perhaps Hampden would do it; but Mr. Monk had been at Eton and Christ Church, and did not care so much about reforming old educational establishments.

It was through that cricket match (in which Abbot's did not triumph) that Perkin became acquainted with Llanthamists, and the friends he gradually made on the wrong side of the water were destined to affect his career. Sylvia, as Mamma confessed, with deep but belated penitence, had been right as usual.

"Mamma," I said to her one day, "you were out when Perkin came, and he wants to bring a friend to tea on Sunday. I was to tell you. Do you mind?"

"No, my dear; of course not. His friends are always nice."

Perkin had by no means fulfilled his own gloomy prediction of becoming intimate with the sons of our tradesmen; even as a Town Boy he had kept no such undesirable company, and the Collegers, or Cardinal's Boys, rather made a point of exclusiveness. He was very genial in school and everywhere with all the boys, but he never brought any one to Cross Place that even Sylvia could have objected to. She was not fond of boys in general, and it was chiefly as a boy that she regarded Perkin himself with some criticism; but the boys he brought home would not be offensive if they were only grown up.

"What is his friend's name? Did he say?" asked Mamma.

"Byrne. Hubert Byrne."

"I used to dance with a Captain Burns, but he was no relation of the poet. I asked him, and he seemed quite offended, though his name was Bertie (I had heard his brother officers call him so), and I naturally thought it was Robert. But it wasn't; Ethelbert was his name. And he was of a good family. The poet was a ploughman, of course, and Captain Burns didn't like it. But he did not give over asking me to dance. That was before my marriage; your dear papa's Rector did not approve of clergymen's wives dancing, and I gave it up; his wife was a charming woman with a wooden leg, not an accident but congenital, as the doctors call it. I dare say Perkin's friend is his son—or nephew; I know he had brothers, who probably married. The age would be just right."

"Hubert Byrne, Mamma; not Burns."

"You never know; perhaps it *is* Burns. You may have caught the name wrong, as I often do; and you and I are more alike than Sylvia and I. In mind you and I are more alike than Sylvia and I. Besides, Hubert makes Bertie for short, just like his father—or uncle, as the case may be. I wonder if he is like Captain Burns; he had a slight limp (not ugly at all; rather interesting) from rheumatic fever: that would settle it."

"Perkin did not mention it."

"No, dear. Perkin would be the last to mention any physical defect in another. He would ignore it; that is so like dear Perkin. His *not* mentioning it would make it only the more probable—in a boy with so scrupulous a delicacy as Perkin."

Sylvia was away, on a short visit to Llanthamy Castle, and she did not come back till Monday. On Sunday, early in the afternoon, Perkin and his friend appeared; the friend certainly did not limp, and his name was undoubtedly Byrne, but he confessed that Burns might be the Scotch form of it, and Mamma, as soon as she got the chance, triumphed over me.

"He has," she declared, "Captain Burns's nose, with just a tilt—not actually *retroussé*. Noses run in some families: more than eyes, I think. After all there are only two eyes, the light and the dark, but noses are almost infinite. The same nose *means* something. I am sure these Irish Byrnes are of the same stock as the Scotch Burnses—apart from the fact that I never heard Captain Burns *was* Scotch; he may have been Irish, too, for all I know—North of Ireland, very likely; but that would not make him less *Irish:* I suppose a Northumbrian is English. You argue sometimes, Marjory, but you will hardly assert that a Northumbrian is not English. Elsie Pye at Miss Tippet's married a gentleman from Northumberland, and his very *name* was English."

Thus Mamma clave to her point, and insisted on regarding Hubert Byrne with a certain sentimental interest, as somehow covered with the halo in which Captain Burns (who danced beautifully, in spite of his limp) hovered in her memory.

Byrne was a very nice boy, two years older than Perkin, tall and manly; not handsome (though Mamma, endowing him with all Captain Burns's good qualities, as heirlooms, said he had notable features), but somehow attractive.

"He has *air,*" Mamma told me in private, "as Captain Burns had. His air was quite Archducal; I heard that said. Mrs. Quigg—I had known her as Amy Plimmer at Miss Tippit's—has travelled in Austria (she stayed nearly a fortnight in Vienna), and she said he reminded her of the Archduke Hildebrand. This boy has air. It never comes accidentally. Depend upon it he is of good blood. You may not recognize it, but Sylvia would."

"He has quite beautiful eyes," I hinted, "almost violet; and I never saw such long, dark eyelashes. But they are rather wistful, not sad exactly."

"I dare say," said Mamma, cheerfully, "they *are* sad. You know there was a tragedy in the family; poor Captain Burns's father shot himself, or drowned himself; yes, now I remember, it was drowning himself he was accused of, for they found the boat, and some people (I heard) had pretended to think he merely fell out, and was drowned because he could not swim. But the general opinion was that the accident was premeditated. That would account for a sad look in his grandson's eyes. I should not be surprised if the real name was Burns after all, and they changed it because of the suicide."

Hubert returning with Perkin from the garden at that moment, I heard no more of his grandfather's suicide then.

CHAPTER XVI

HUBERT not only had "air" but he had delightful manners, not young-mannish but frank and boylike; to Mamma he was prettily deferential, to me most courteous and pleasant. He had lived nearly all his life in England, and had no brogue, but just a hint of an Irish intonation that I thought very pretty. In spite of the sad look I had thought there was in his eyes, he was anything but dismal, but merry and cheerful. A lad of nearly nineteen will often be rather patronizing to a boy of sixteen and a half, but Byrne did not in the least try to patronize Perkin. They seemed already great friends—but that was Perkin's way; he found out at once what there was to like in people and became intimate immediately. It was easy to see that my brother was quite fond of Hubert, and that Byrne was pleased by it.

"What a pretty room!" he said, looking about him with alert, appreciative eyes; and Mamma was flattered. "Auberon has shown me the other rooms too, and they are all charming. This is the first Monksbridge house I was ever in, but I have always admired their outsides."

"You can't see Cross Place from any road," Mamma observed complacently, mindful of our dignified seclusion.

"No; but I've seen it from the river, and thought how nice it looked. Our houses in Llanthamy are mostly ugly."

"Isn't yours a pretty house?" asked Mamma. "But perhaps you don't live quite in the town?"

"Yes, we do, in a regular street. And it's an ugly house, neither old nor very new. Just one of a row, all nearly the same; and we've no lady to make it pretty inside for us, even if we had the things—and we have not. We have no pictures or china or beautiful furniture like yours."

"Ah," said Mamma, "there should be a lady in every house. Gentlemen can never manage servants."

"Ours manage *us*. They have both been with us since before I was born; but they don't ill-treat us. In fact, they are very kind so long as we are good."

"I'm sure you're always good."

"My father is not! He comes in at all hours for his meals, and sometimes makes mud-marks on the stair-carpet with his boots. Sarah is English and thinks that frightful."

Mamma, being also English, looked as if she thought Sarah was right.

"And both of us," Hubert went on cheerfully, "wear the holes in our socks so big that Sarah says it's cruel having to darn abbesses."

"Abysses," Perkin suggested, that Mamma might understand the allusion. She smiled, but her sympathies were much divided between Sarah and the two careless male creatures she had to darn for.

"And," said Hubert, "Norah is a good cook, and it drives her crazy when my father comes in so late that his dinner is spoiled. He doesn't care what he eats, and only says, 'Well, Norah, I'll be punctual if you'll arrange that no one shall be ill at meal-times.'"

"Is Mr. Burns a clergyman?" Mamma inquired with special interest. "An old friend of mine of your name (Marjory has heard me speak of him) became a clergyman. I remember hearing that he had simply no appetite—after measles that was; they're so trying when one has them full grown."

"A clergyman!" Hubert answered, laughing a little. "Anything but! My father is a doctor and a Catholic."

"Oh, really!" Mamma murmured. It was the first time in her life she had ever sat down to tea with a Catholic; and it was disappointing too, for she was sure none of Captain Burns's relations had been Catholics. But a sanguine temperament is equal to any emergency, and she had barely had time to ask Perkin to pull one of the blinds down a little, before it occurred to her that Hubert's father had probably gone over to Rome, and changed his name for the sake of his family.

"It is a sad pity," she observed kindly, "that you and your father have no lady to take care of you."

"Yes, so I tell him. Father is only forty-six and very good looking, and I say he ought to marry again."

"You are right, especially as you are not a daughter. Stepsons and stepmothers get on very well, I think."

"I say that too. But father won't hear of it."

"Won't he, indeed?" said Mamma, a little stiffly, as if she did not think much of the Doctor's manners.

At tea we sat down round the dining-room table, and Mamma said grace. I think it startled her a little when Hubert bent his head and crossed himself, not ostentatiously, but not in the least as if he were ashamed of it. Perkin, I'm afraid, winked at me, and asked me in a low voice if I had a vinaigrette about me; but to do him justice, neither Mamma nor Hubert could hear this.

"You wouldn't remember," she said to me, her rapid faculty of association having carried her thoughts far from the present company, "the man that used to sweep our chimneys at Carysford—your dear papa's first curacy; in fact, he was merely locum-tenens for a Mr. Swilton who went under a long operation, and we only stayed two or three months. But the chimneys were quite clogged, and we had to have them swept on the Tuesday after we came—no, Wednesday, for we had boiled mutton, and it was red-raw inside. Murphy his name was, and the blackest eyes you ever saw. (It's quite a mistake to think that the Irish have all red hair.) I saw him afterwards in the street on a Sunday, and he was quite smart, and as clean—only of course his hair still black. He mended the caster of an armchair that had come off, and it rocked so that you felt quite sea-sick in it. Of course we gave him sixpence extra for it (I fancy the Irish are all handy), and he spat on it for luck—he was quite uneducated, you understand; and I remember your father (who talked to him while he was sweeping it) told me that he only wished all our own people, chimney-sweeps or no, knew and cared as much about their religion as Tim Murphy did about his." And dear Mamma, always determined to look at the best side of everything, smiled with kindly indulgence on Hubert, whose father might still belong to her Burnses, and who could not help being a Catholic himself if his parents had been.

Hubert smiled back, showing all his good-natured, brilliant teeth, and if he only half understood Mamma's story and its connexion with himself, he evidently understood her kind intention, and evidently liked her. I think Perkin and I both liked him better, too, for liking her: for we were fonder of her, perhaps, even than Sylvia was, though neither of us could ever hope to hold Sylvia's place in her esteem. And, though Mamma always missed Sylvia very much if she was away for a day or two, and thought everything must go wrong, still I think that on such occasions she talked more, and enjoyed a sort of liberty. For her high idea of Sylvia's cleverness kept her just a little in awe, and anxious to avoid rambling on in her presence in the way that did very well for us. I dare say Mrs. Milton felt something of the same sort when her husband was out of the way. It must not be supposed that Mamma's favourite daughter snubbed her, or seemed impatient at her reminiscences, for that would be most unjust to my sister, who only snubbed me and Perkin, and was never once in her life disrespectful to our mother: it was only dear Mamma's instinct that led her to feel that for Sylvia conversation in slippers, so to speak, was not good enough.

Hubert being a Catholic, once she had got over the slight initial shock, gave him in Mamma's eyes a sort of outlandish interest—as if he had been an amiable (and good-looking) Patagonian or Friendly Islander.

"That sad look in his eyes," she told me afterwards, "may be due to the Inquisition: no doubt he is ashamed of it—and of course it's not his fault."

"I wish," she said, during tea, "I had known: it would have been quite easy to have some fish—just as easy as eggs and cold ham."

"I can't abide fish," Hubert assured her, "and I like ham better than anything."

"You're very polite," she said, shaking her head, "but Perkin should have told us."

Perkin laughed aloud and reminded her it was not Friday. And Hubert laughed too and tried to convince her that Catholics seldom care for fish.

"I wish," she said later on, "that you and Perkin were at school together."

She really liked Hubert better than any of the boys from Abbot's School that Perkin had brought to Cross Place.

"I'm not eligible for Abbot's, you see," he answered, smiling, "I live on the wrong side of the bridge."

"And," said Perkin, rather fiercely, with a sort of little blush, "nobody is eligible for the Cardinal's school who belongs to the Cardinal's religion."

Mamma, I am sure, did not understand at all why Perkin spoke with a sort of protesting vehemence: perhaps I did not, then. But Hubert did, and he said, laughingly—

"It's not your fault, anyway. Cheer up, Perkin."

"My fault, no!" my brother exclaimed. "But I think it a beastly shame. Here am I, a Protestant, collaring the Cardinal's red gown and his sixty-seven pounds; and you who belong to his Church with much more right to them——"

"Except," Hubert remarked, with all his good-natured teeth shining out of his smile, "except that I haven't gained them, and you have."

"That's nonsense," said Perkin; "you could pass any examination, twice as well, that I could pass at all. Lord Monksbridge is very keen about reforming Abbot's; he'd better begin by getting it thrown open to the people it was founded for."

Mamma was quite puzzled; she could not in the least guess what had ruffled Perkin.

"My dear," she said nervously, "if none of you will have any more, I think we'd better go back to the drawing-room. They will want to clear away and wash up, to get to church."

CHAPTER XVII

When Sylvia came home she heard about Hubert's visit, but did not, then, pay much attention. He lived on the wrong side of the bridge; but as most of Llanthamy belonged to Lord Monksbridge, and she had just come from Llanthamy Castle, her strictly Monksbridge prejudice was a good deal in abeyance.

"Dr. Byrne? Oh yes!" she remarked carelessly. "I heard his name only yesterday. Lady Monksbridge mentioned him. He is rather a clever doctor. Not *their* doctor, I suppose: but he looks after the servants—and the agent's wife too, Mrs. Lloyd; she is in a decline, I think."

"Hubert Burns," Mamma declared (thinking of the Captain, perhaps), "is quite a gentleman. No one could doubt that. I never saw more pleasing manners in a youth."

"Very likely. One often sees it. A father may be very ordinary and a son almost of a different class."

"You may," I observed, "have seen a recent instance."

Of course I had no business to say it, and knew that I had not; but Sylvia talked of Perkin's friend just as she might have done if he had been a coachman's son who had received an education.

She raised her eyebrows, but deigned no other notice of my ill-breeding. She merely punished me by saying nothing, till she was alone with Mamma, of an important subject: and probably would have waited in any case.

"For my part," Mamma went on, "I like Hubert better than any of Perkin's school friends. I only wish he was at Abbot's; but, of course, he can't be—none of the Llanthamy people's sons can."

"That," Sylvia observed, in a sort of family manner, "is one of the things Lord Monksbridge would like to have reformed. Abbot's is quite big enough for Monksbridge and Llanthamy: he says it ought to be open to both towns."

"Yes, my dear, so it ought. Now Perkin has his gown and his Exhibition. But Hubert is a Roman Catholic, too. He wouldn't be eligible in any case."

"No. A Roman Catholic? I suppose Lady Monksbridge knew, but she didn't mention it. She only spoke of Dr. Byrne in relation to his profession. It's absurd to be a Roman Catholic nowadays."

"The Cardinal was one when he founded Abbot's," I suggested—thinking of Perkin and his annoyance at his friend's exclusion from the good things the Cardinal had provided.

"Of course," said Sylvia, coldly. "Our ancestors all were. It was the same with everybody then. It was the custom. But we don't go about in chain-armour now: to be a Catholic now is ridiculous. And no one is. This Dr. Byrne, I fancy, merely attends the servants at Llanthamy Castle. I quite gathered that."

Sylvia was not in the least concerned about Dr. Byrne and his son, and Perkin's intimacy with the latter. She had more important matters to interest herself in: as I was soon to hear. She simply gave utterance to her practical view of things. Perkin's irresponsible friendships were neither here nor there.

Later, in the evening, while I was dressing for dinner, Mamma came into my room. We dined at eight now, and had a very slender luncheon at one. Not that our dinner was much: still, we had soup, and dessert—apples, or oranges, in winter, in summer any fruit there was in the garden.

"Madge," said Mamma, in a fluttered, mysterious manner, after going back to the door to see if it was tightly closed, "I have something to tell you about dear Sylvia. You will hardly believe it."

"Yes, I shall. Mr. Monk has proposed to her." I was quite ashamed of having spoiled Mamma's disclosure, when I saw how she had been intending to creep gently up to it, round and about.

"How did you guess? She couldn't have given you a hint. She told me she hadn't!"

And Mamma sat down, quite suddenly, by my dressing-table.

"No, dear. She didn't tell me. But *I* could have told *her*—eighteen months ago."

"Oh no, my dear! It was only yesterday. In the afternoon. He proposed just by that lead god (Apollo, I think), with the water trickling down his cheek out of the basket on his head—near the bowling green. Eighteen months ago! You don't suppose she would have kept me in the dark for a year and a half? It was yesterday. And Lord and Lady Monksbridge both wish it. It is very flattering that they should. He says so."

"Says it is flattering?"

"No, my dear: but that they are quite anxious she should accept him."

"As she has, no doubt."

"No, my dear. She told him she would bear it in mind."

"Bear it in mind!"

"Well, she said she would give it her careful consideration: it means the same thing. She told him she would talk it over with me."

"Did she think you likely to object?"

"I don't see why she should, though she is very young—eighteen and a half. But I was only just eighteen when I married your dear papa—and we had been engaged four months."

"And Sylvia is much older for her age than you were."

"Yes. I was very young at eighteen. I had not Sylvia's decision of character. When your dear papa proposed I fainted."

"I'm sure Sylvia did not faint," I observed, smiling grimly.

"No, dear. She has such self-command. And it wasn't, she confesses, wholly unexpected: he had tried to propose (more than once) before, only she wouldn't let him——"

"So she let him yesterday. I wonder she didn't say 'Yes' at once."

I believe Mamma was really more surprised that she had not than I was. Nothing Sylvia ever did surprised me, for I never had the least idea what she would do. It is when we think we know how people are likely to behave that they are constantly surprising us.

"She does not seem at all excited," Mamma remarked presently; "she takes it almost as a matter of course."

"So it is. I only wonder it has taken so long. The very day we went to luncheon there first I felt sure he would propose to her."

"Did you really, my dear? Well, it never occurred to me. I should have been less surprised if it had been that young cavalry officer—Sir Hector FitzNorris—who was staying at Monkspark; he paid her more marked attention, and came over here several times. I thought his attentions very marked, and she seemed to have no objection."

"I dare say she had no objection. If he liked it, it didn't harm her."

"But, Madge, your sister is not a flirt."

"Not in the least. But she never flirted with Sir Hector. If he chose to run after her, she was not bound to run away—she never does run. Am I to say anything about this to her?"

"Well, no, not unless she begins; you can't congratulate her till we know what she has decided."

"I know that already."

"You think she will refuse him? You think she is not in love with him?"

"My dear Mamma, I haven't the least idea how Sylvia would look if she were in love. But I am quite sure she won't refuse Mr. Monk—definitely. May I tell Perkin?"

"She said *I* might tell *you;* and I don't see why you shouldn't tell your brother. Only make him be careful—he likes to tease her."

So we went down to dinner, and found Sylvia in the drawing-room reading a review Lord Monksbridge had lent her. She looked lovely. Her dress was simple, but she always dressed perfectly; and in the last year and a half she had certainly improved, though she had needed no improvement. She was taller, and her figure was more graceful than ever. No one could be surprised that Mr. Monk should admire her.

She got up, and put her review aside, saying with a cool smile—

"You two have been gossiping."

Mamma gave a little laugh, and I, finding my sister in a peculiarly amiable humour, took her hand and pressed it, as I was not to say anything.

"Nothing is decided," she said quietly; "we had better not discuss it."

Then dinner was announced, and we went away to the dining-room, where she talked about the article on University Reform Lord Monksbridge had asked her to read.

"Perkin had better hurry up," she observed, smiling seriously. "Once they set to on the Universities you don't know what they will touch."

At Abbot's there was a special scholarship only to be gained once in five years, or rather, the scholarship was at Belêsme College in Oxford, open to none but Abbotites; it was worth over three hundred a year and considered a sort of blue ribbon among scholarships. The examinations for it would take place in less than a year, and Perkin would then be just old enough to compete; the Warden thought his chance of success very good.

"Oh!" Mamma cried, almost groaning, "I do wish Lord Monksbridge would not interfere with the Universities till Perkin is safe. Does Mr. Monk want to destroy the scholarships?"

"Mr. Monk? I don't know at all. It was with his father I was talking about it. And you know Mr. Monk is not in Parliament yet."

At the mention of his name she had looked quite severely at us; the maid was in the room, waiting upon us, and Sylvia did not wish her to have any "ideas" about Mr. Monk. At dessert, when we were alone, she said again—

"Nothing is decided. Please do not think it is. Mr. Monk quite understands that nothing is decided."

"I'm sure," Mamma declared, "he will be terribly disappointed if you don't decide as he wishes."

Sylvia shook her head slightly, not as if she doubted it, but because she could not perceive that that was the point.

"It is, I am sure," said Mamma, "a most flattering offer."

"Flattering?"

And Sylvia, as she repeated the word, raised one eyebrow a little. She never shrugged her beautiful shoulders, but when she lifted one eyebrow it had just the effect of a shrug.

"Well, dear," Mamma tried hurriedly to explain, "he is a charming young man——"

"I should certainly not allow a nasty one to propose to me," my sister remarked in a calm parenthesis.

"No, dear; of course not," Mamma went on much more hastily. "But then he has *everything* on his side——"

"Oh, Mamma!"

And I must say I never admired Sylvia more than when she said this with unfeigned and calm protest.

" I mean," poor Mamma pleaded, " all the wealth and position."

" They have," Sylvia observed, peeling her orange gracefully, " only the makings of a position. And wealth is nothing if you don't know what to do with it. They haven't the least idea. In their hands the position is a false position, and the wealth almost a vulgarity."

" ' They! ' " Mamma exclaimed. She had not been thinking at all about Mr. Monk's parents, and Sylvia hardly seemed to be thinking at all about Mr. Monk.

Behind the rare exotic (from the Llanthamy Castle hothouses), in one of Sir Stapleton's silver wine-coolers, that screened my face from Sylvia's, I smiled grimly.

" Yes," my sister explained, with lucid calmness, " they. Lord and Lady Monksbridge. Excellent creatures! But a comic peer and peeress. And with all their wealth like a millstone round their necks! How can you say he has everything on his side? "

It was the first time she had spoken of " him," and I listened with keener interest.

" If," she went on, with a faint heightening of colour that made her look more lovely than ever, " he *had* everything on his side, I should not hesitate at all——"

" Ah! " cried Mamma, much relieved, " you would say yes? "

Sylvia almost frowned, which she never did quite. " I should say No. I am not a person who enjoys receiving favours. If Mr. Monk were a duke's son (which he couldn't be—he would be Lord Hampden; unless he were the eldest son, and then he would probably be a marquis) I should say No. I could be of no use to him."

"But, my dear," Mamma expostulated, quite harrowed in her tender feelings for the duke's son, "if he loved you? And with your beauty!"

"I could do nothing for him," Sylvia went on firmly. "As for his being in love, that would be his affair. One can't marry every one who may be in love with one. But I could do a good deal for the Monksbridge family, if I decided to do what Mr. Monk suggests. *We* have family. And breeding. And I should be able to—*make* their position for them, and teach them how to be rich without being a laughing-stock."

I could see plainly that the prospect of doing all this appealed to her. She spoke with unusual fluency and directness, and with the animation that her beauty sometimes lacked to make it really interesting. Of her beauty itself she never said a word, and thought, I am sure, very little. She was not in the least vain. Her beauty was merely a part of herself, and it was with herself as a whole that she was serenely satisfied. No doubt Mr. Monk thought of her beauty, but he was only a young man; she was not thinking of any young man, but of the next Lady Monksbridge. It would be suitable, of course, that the next Lady Monksbridge should be beautiful—it would be a part of her distinction. It was because I thoroughly understood all this that I came to understand fully my sister's idea of her Mission. And when I went into Mamma's room at bed-time to kiss her and say good night, I whispered—

"You needn't be in the least suspense. She will marry him."

"But, Madge, she hardly says a word about him. Why do you think she cares for him?"

"Oh, she never thinks of that. She thinks it will be her duty."

"For our sakes? Of course it would be a great thing for us all—for you and Perkin. But I shouldn't like her to do it for that. We can get on very well as we are."

I couldn't help laughing a little as I kissed her again.

"No, Mugs, she wouldn't do it for that," I said, as I kissed her pretty ear, like a pink shell. "It won't be for our sakes, but for the sake of the Monksbridge family."

And, laughing a little, I hugged dear Mamma, and ran off to avoid explanations.

CHAPTER XVIII

On the following morning Sylvia said nothing to either of us about Mr. Monk directly, though she talked quite willingly of her visit to Llanthamy Castle.

"It is certainly a very fine house," she observed dispassionately. "Really enormous. But they don't know what to do with it. I should think that there are dozens of bedrooms no one has ever slept in—Lady Monksbridge said as much. They know so few people at all intimately; and of course Mr. Monk's friends are merely young men—*they* come; but I don't fancy he has *many* friends whom he invites to stay there. And a succession of young men, even if there were scores of them, would be no good—none whatever."

Mamma did not know why, but felt she ought to, and did not like to ask.

"It is," Sylvia declared, "a house that should have a great position of its own, on its own account, but it has practically none. There are people who are *made* by their house, but Lord and Lady Monksbridge are only swallowed up by their Castle. Look at Mr. and Mrs. Brocas-Jones; if they hadn't Fell Court they would be nobodies. They are both of them plain, dull people; they have no appearance and no manners, and they have nothing to say to anybody that anybody on earth wants to hear. But they *aren't* nobodies—

Fell Court does everything for them. It has been Fell Court for four centuries, and there have always been Brocases there. But Llanthamy Castle has never had any position, and it can't give Lord and Lady Monksbridge any, though it is at least six times as big as Fell Court. It is very sad."

"Perhaps," I suggested airily, "Lord and Lady Monksbridge don't mind being nobodies."

"*She* doesn't," Sylvia admitted frankly; "she would rather be less than she is—if she could. But he would like to be somebody if he knew how. He is not a stupid man, and he must know that it is stupid to be a peer with seventy or eighty thousand a year, and to be really of not the least consequence. He is," she added calmly, "a man with a sense of right, and I can see that he feels it. It is not fair to a neighbourhood to have a great place like Llanthamy Castle, with a huge estate round it, empty and useless."

"If Mr. Monk married well——" Mamma began with furtive diplomacy.

"Dear Mamma," Sylvia interposed firmly, "nothing is decided. Do not let us speak of that. I was merely talking of the general principle."

"Perhaps," I suggested, "Mamma was only *meaning* the general principle. Mr. Monk might marry a duke's daughter."

"No, I think not," Sylvia replied, after a moment's cool consideration; "I don't think he could. I fancy the only duke he knows at all is the Duke of Tilbury, here at Castle Peovor, and that very slightly; and you know Lady Adelberta and Lady Maria are nearly fifty. I must say Llanthamy Castle is kept *up* perfectly. There are nine housemaids, and their *chef* is a treasure (though Lady Monksbridge says he is not honest); but then she prefers boiled mutton to anything, and what's the good of a *chef* when you like boiled neck of mutton better than anything?"

"I hoped," said Mamma, with a puzzled disappointment in her tone, "that you were enjoying your visit. I like being there; Lady Monksbridge is always so nice to me."

"Yes, she is nice; and so is he. Oh yes, I enjoyed my visit, but one longs to set them right. I couldn't help feeling that all the time."

"Well, dear, and why *shouldn't* you set it all right, as you say? You seem so thoroughly to understand what is amiss."

"Dear Mamma, nothing is decided," Sylvia expostulated, shaking her head a little. "Please let us keep to the general principle."

I must say I began to doubt whether I had not been hasty in assuring Mamma that Sylvia would certainly marry Mr. Monk.

We all went that day to luncheon at Monkspark. We had been engaged to go before Sylvia went to stay at Llanthamy Castle, and she had returned on purpose to keep this engagement, gently but firmly refusing Lady Monksbridge's earnest request that she would stay on at Llanthamy, and send word that she was doing so to Mamma.

"Of course I could not do that," Sylvia explained to us; "it would be as much as to say that something was decided."

"I wish you *had* stayed on," Mamma confessed incautiously; "I could easily have made your excuses to Mr. de Braose and Lady Gladys."

"No; that would not have done. *They* would have guessed something—and you know Lady Gladys is rather a gossip. And Lady Llantwddwy is driving us there. You would have had to explain to *her;* and she is always on the look-out for engagements. She would tell every one it was decided."

So we all three were driven out to Monkspark by Lady Llantwddwy, who was full of curiosity to hear all about Sylvia's visit to Llanthamy Castle.

"Oh yes!" my sister answered, in reply to half a dozen leading questions. "I enjoyed it very much. I am so fond of Lady Monksbridge—no one who knows her well could help it. They are very hospitable. No, hardly any one came to dinner; and no one was staying there, except an old cousin of Lord Monksbridge's, a Miss Pilkin. Dull? No, I am never dull anywhere. And they are not dull people."

"Mr. Monk is clever, they tell me," said the Viscountess, with demure alertness.

"Yes; so I hear too. I should think it is true. He was only there part of the time. You asked about the *ménage;* well, it is all very fine. They have legions of servants, and very good ones, and the style of living is excellent. I think their *chef* would suit you better than Lady Monksbridge—she likes boiled mutton and parsley sauce."

I must say that I admired the way in which my sister, with her placid ingenuousness, defeated all that old woman's inquisitiveness. And I could see how it gave Sylvia a calm pleasure to perceive that Lady Llantwddwy was sure "nothing had come" of the visit.

"Ah," said Lady Gladys de Braose, as she welcomed us, "so Sylvia has torn herself away from the charms of Llanthamy Castle! We thought they would have inveigled her into staying on."

"Oh no," said Sylvia. "There was no idea of that. I was only asked till Monday."

Lady Gladys was forty-four, perhaps three years older than her husband, and had long professed great delicacy of health, but she was still very good-looking, having been a beauty and an heiress. Almost all the de Braoses married beauties and heiresses except the squire who had preceded the present Mr. de Braose's father, who had only married an heiress—our neighbour Lady Llantwddwy.

Mr. de Braose looked quite as old as his wife, and had thin hair and rather watery eyes: he was a regular de Braose, whereas his brother Eustace had inherited his mother's good looks—as she frequently informed the public. Still Mr. de Braose looked distinguished; his features were rather over-refined, as was his voice; and, if his eyes and hair were weak, they suggested the idea that they had been wearing so during centuries. His manners were very good, amiable, though not intimate; and though he was stout, like his mother, he was tall enough to seem merely portly: and he was not *more* than stout; only a political opponent in the blindness of party feeling could have called him really fat. Lady Gladys was in mourning. After several years of married life she had borne a son, and the child, about ten months after our arrival at Monksbridge, had died, which surprised no one but his father, who had the highest ideas of duty in one's station. He had always done his: but how could the heir of the great Monksbridge estates fulfil his duties except here on earth? Mr. de Braose was never uncharitable, but he secretly felt that the child who could so desert his post must have inherited some of the Van Teuffel inconsequence. Lady Gladys had been a Van Teuffel, and that family, ever since William of Orange had brought it over to England, had been, in spite of its beauty, inconsequent. But Mr. de Braose was a fair-minded man, and he was not angry with poor Lady Gladys because the only child she had borne him was dead: if she came of an inconsequent family he need not have married into it; that he perfectly recognized. Nor was he angry with Eustace for being at present in quite a new position of importance: it was not Eustace's fault, but that unpersevering baby's. As for Eustace, he was heartily sorry for his brother and his brother's wife, and for the baby too, but he did not think of the baby with the slightest irritation. He was a good-natured young man, and could not lean heavily on the failure to do his duty of a child who had not injured him. No doubt the poor little fellow would have lived if he could—he himself would certainly not have died at four years old, had he been born heir to Monkspark and twelve thousand a year, and able to go on living.

Eustace was staying at Monkspark now, and was aware that he had one of the best rooms, which he used not to be given in former days; and he knew that his brother, and his sister-in-law, and the servants, all treated him as if he had recently done something distinguished and meritorious. He was very careful now never to ask any of those little questions which he had been used to ask by way of showing a brotherly interest in the old place, and the estate; but the squire constantly told him of this or that plan, or projected improvement, inquiring if he approved. Though one of the brothers was eighteen years younger than the other, they were very united.

CHAPTER XIX

The Duke of Tilbury and the Ladies Adelberta and Maria Zouche lunched at Monkspark that day; and Lord and Lady Closeborough and their son, Lord Chevronel, were staying in the house. The late Duchess had been an aunt of the present Mr. de Braose's; and Lady Closeborough was a niece of that other Mr. de Braose, who had married Lord Llantwddwy's widow. Lord Chevronel was, perhaps, a year or so younger than Mr. Eustace de Braose and he was also " in diplomacy." What I thought equally interesting was that he was handsome and uncommonly pleasant; and he evidently thought Sylvia worth all the attention she would give him a chance of devoting to her. It wasn't very much, for she never flirted, and she never annoyed people's parents and guardians by seeming to encourage attentions that she cared nothing about.

The old Duke, who was wonderfully well preserved while sitting down (he aged, rather, when he scrambled about), had very sharp eyes, and he saw that Lord Chevronel was much more disposed to let Sylvia see how much he admired her than she was to take advantage of it; and his grace thought well of her, and was extremely civil to her. So were his daughters: so were Lord and Lady Closeborough. This civility of the last-mentioned four dignitaries became specially decided after a little talk between Lady Adelberta and Sylvia which took place just after luncheon. We ladies were in the picture-gallery, and my sister was being shown a portrait of the late Duchess of Tilbury as a girl (a girl with feet much smaller than anybody's hands, and eyes much larger than her own mouth) trying to see what o'clock it was by a sundial in a shady grove.

"It is like both of you," I heard Sylvia observe, in her low voice, with a glance from Lady Adelberta to Lady Maria—in the distance: I could only suppose that the Duchess's eyes had been divided between her three sons and two daughters, and had naturally grown smaller in the process.

Lady Adelberta smiled and confessed that likenesses ran oddly in families even when the features were different.

"Gravesend has her nose," she added (Lord Gravesend was her eldest brother). "I am so glad to meet you—Lady Gladys was afraid they might keep you on at Llanthamy Castle——"

"Oh no!" said Sylvia, smiling. "I told Lady Monksbridge I must keep my engagement—I wanted so much to come here."

"And she couldn't prevail! Lady Gladys thought she would prevail."

And I could see that Lady Adelberta was quite as inquisitive as Lady Llanthamy: but instead of defeating her curiosity, to my surprise I found Sylvia this time truckling to it: certainly it was best to make up my mind, once and for all, that I could never guess what she would do.

Sylvia smiled again, and asked demurely, "Why?"

"Oh, my dear! You'll think me so very indiscreet."

"Not at all. Why did Lady Gladys think I should not be here—when we had all promised?"

"My dear Miss Auberon—it seems so *very* indiscreet: you will think me so *impertinent!* You know Gladys is *so* romantic."

Sylvia did not know anything of the kind: she only knew that her hostess was a gossip of the first water: but she smiled once more, as if fully aware of Lady Gladys's romantic disposition.

"Romantic! Yes: but what romance would there be in my staying on with dear Lady Monksbridge?" murmured my sister innocently—innocently, but not forbiddingly.

"Ah, my dear! There might be a romance—am I *too* indiscreet?—in which Lady Monksbridge (an excellent woman, I hear on all sides) would be only a—a *third* party."

Sylvia slowly blushed, slowly and slightly (and how she did it at all, I could not understand then; perhaps, it now occurs to me, it was to hear her supposititious mother-in-law called an excellent woman), and after a moment's pause, she looked down, and round, and up, and said—

"Nothing is decided."

"Ah!" Lady Adelberta almost whispered. "How very nice of you! How very nice of you not to punish my indiscretion. And you will find I am really discreet: nothing (I understand perfectly) is *decided.*"

"No, nothing."

It was not long afterwards that Lady Adelberta nailed (so to speak) her sister, in a corner; and I think Lady Closeborough was presently nailed in another corner. At all events all three ladyships and

Lord Closeborough presently redoubled their civilities to Sylvia. The Duke might be as gallant as he pleased, and so might Lord Chevronel: when Sylvia had said nothing was decided Lady Adelberta understood at once that in Miss Auberon she beheld the next Lady Monksbridge.

"Papa," said Lady Maria, ambling over to my mother half an hour later, "*wishes* so much you would allow Miss Auberon to come and stay a few days at Castle Peovor. We should *enjoy* it so much—Adelberta and I."

I saw Sylvia listening, and I saw that something had happened just as she intended it should; why, I could not remotely guess. And when Lady Closeborough, ten minutes later, sidled down into the seat next Mamma and asked if she could spare Miss Auberon for a night or two, to join in tableaux vivants at Close Chace, I could again perceive that Sylvia had gained some point—inscrutable to me. When Lady Maria had given *her* invitation, Sylvia's face was so turned that Mamma could see her almost invisible nod of acquiescence, and had accepted in the sure and certain hope of doing what she should. Now, though I could see my sister's face, Mamma could only see Lord Closeborough's back, and she was not so sure.

"You are so kind," Mamma murmured. "It is very kind of you. But I don't quite know what Sylvia's plans are. For the fifteenth? There was some idea that about the fifteenth she would be going to revisit——"

"Ah!" Lady Closeborough whispered. "I think I guess. No, no! *I know nothing is decided.* But by the fifteenth, you know—three weeks—if anything should be decided by then. We want an extra young man too. (Eustace de Braose laughs too much for tableaux.) Do let her come; and *if* she could help us to a young man—tall; I know he is tall—excuse me, I know it is a *tall* young man we want! Miss Auberon *might* (by the fifteenth) help us to a tall young man. Pray understand that any tall young man she could help us to would be *included in the invitation*."

All this time I saw calculation gleaming in the eye of this Countess just as if she had been a Mrs. Todgers —not calculation as to beds and stowage, but as to the much greater desirability of Miss Auberon's company at Close Chace *with* a tall young man than without. And Sylvia half turned and half nodded, and Mamma hurriedly promised that, if her girl found she could go, she should. And again I saw by Sylvia's face that she had scored a point—perhaps two points.

" So, Sylvia," said Lady Llantwddwy, as we drove home, " you are going to stay at Castle Peovor, and at Close Chace?"

" Yes," said Sylvia, as if she thought neither circumstance of much importance.

" They are very big houses," observed her ladyship, somewhat rashly.

" They would both fit into Llanthamy Castle and no one know they were there," my sister remarked coolly.

Lady Llantwddwy really blinked with astonishment; and she disliked being astonished so much that she said, still more rashly, nudging, so to speak, with her words—

"So you would not care to be a duchess—or a countess?"

"I shouldn't care," Sylvia replied, laughing gently, "to have step-daughters older than Mamma. Or a mother-in-law in drab and green who thought herself well-dressed."

"Sylvia!" gasped Mamma.

"My dear Mamma," Sylvia explained, with perfect ease of manner, "I was only putting ridiculous hypothetical cases. No one on earth, not even dear Lady Llantwddwy, thinks me in the least likely to be a duchess or a countess. Lady Closeborough is good enough to wish Mr. Monk to take part, and me also, in her tableaux. I don't know if he cares for the sort of thing."

Lady Llantwddwy gasped this time, and Mamma, needlessly apprehensive of battle, fidgeted in her seat. But peace is often maintained by the absolute readiness for war displayed by the best equipped of the possible parties to it; and Lady Llantwddwy instantly recognized that Sylvia's equipment was far more complete than her own.

"I don't know," my sister remarked, "whether Mr. Monk cares for being the *tall* young man in tableaux vivants. I advised Lady Closeborough to let Lady Gladys drive her over to Llanthamy Castle and find out. He is certainly tall, and that seems to be the great thing."

"But, Sylvia dear," said the old Viscountess, with affable reproach, "you never let on to *us* about Mr. Monk, and I was dying to know; I was rather jealous to hear it all from Elizabeth Closeborough."

"Dear Lady Llantwddwy, there was nothing to hear. If you think I said anything to Lady Closeborough——"

"No; Adelberta told her."

"Ah, but I never told Lady Adelberta anything—she was fishing, you know; and I assured her that nothing was decided. Mamma would know if it was. Ask Mamma if *she* has been told anything."

"No, dear, I really didn't know anything till Lady Adelberta began congratulating me——" Mamma was beginning.

"And," said Sylvia, firmly, "*she* knew nothing."

"Except," Lady Llantwddwy remarked, wagging her long head knowingly, "that 'nothing is decided.' We must make our own guesses—and (if you weren't here to snub me) I should congratulate Mrs. Auberon."

CHAPTER XX

On the following Sunday Mr. Monk came to tea, and so did Lord Chevronel and Mr. Eustace de Braose. Lord Chevronel was quite cheerful, his cousin not particularly so; and Mr. Monk, who had arrived first, looked as if he thought we had more young men than was necessary.

" My mother," Lord Chevronel told him, " is going over to see Lady Monksbridge, to-morrow. It is some time since she was at Monkspark, and she hasn't seen your mother for ages."

Then, with a little laugh, he added: " She would like to find *you* in too. For she has a plot against you. On the fifteenth we are breaking out into Tableaux Vivants, and she wants you to be a young man——"

" A *tall* young man," Sylvia suggested with her most innocent *sang-froid*. " Unless he's tall you'd better warn him not to attempt it."

If Sylvia had been as old and plain as Miss Belvoir, I dare say Lady Closeborough's son would have thought her impertinent: as it was he did not mind a bit, but laughed very comfortably, and said—

" She has perfect confidence in your being tall by the fifteenth. Do think it over. I'm no good at tableaux. I wobble too much: and Eustace simmers. My mother builds on you."

" Won't she and Lady Gladys come to luncheon to-morrow? And you two as well."

"*I* can't. I'm engaged, unfortunately," Eustace declared gloomily, looking as if the misfortune were that he wasn't engaged.

"*I'm* not," said Lord Chevronel with vivacity. "Yes; thank you very much, I'll tell them, and bring them."

I am sure that he thought, this innocent young creature, that Sylvia would be there: which she had not meant to be. His Mamma had nonchalantly alluded, in his presence, to Miss Auberon's engagement, and mentioned with a succulent, almost caressing lingering over the figures, that Lord Monksbridge had a hundred thousand a year, which was only double his actual income. And he had not minded in the least; the eldest son of an Earl with only a nominal twenty thousand a year, and thirty years of life in him, can't look to afford luxuries that lie open to only sons of a hundred thousand a year. But he thought Monk uncommonly lucky; he and Eustace de Braose had known him, slightly, at Eton, and Lord Chevronel thought him a decent fellow, but "sticky." Miss Auberon he foresaw, with his cheerful common sense, would be the makings of the Monksbridge family. Meanwhile he liked looking at her, not obtrusively, and talking to or near her.

Eustace did not feel like that. He could (and, now Miss Auberon was engaged, he thought that he would) have behaved quite differently had he foreseen that his poor little nephew would behave as he had. As a mere *attaché,* with an income chiefly supplied by his mother, and the rest of it due to his elder brother's correct family feeling, he had perceived, when he first met her, that Miss Auberon was out of the question. *She,* he had known, had taken it for granted: and, with her wonderful, silent tact, had let him understand that he was not to indulge in any foolish idea of admiring her. But now he could please himself. Miss Auberon, he knew, was quite as fit to reign at Monkspark as his sister-in-law was, as his mother or his aunt had been. He was not mercenary, and he was not in the least a snob: he need not, now, marry an heiress, and he would as lief his wife should be plain Mrs. de Braose as that she should be Lady Gwendoline, or the Honble. Mrs. de Braose.

And Miss Auberon was to be the next Lady Monksbridge! He also admitted the suitability of the arrangement: she would give Llanthamy Castle all it needed: but then he did not care sixpence for the regeneration of Llanthamy Castle, and felt much more interest in the future mistress of Monkspark. Why hadn't he, miraculously, foreseen what Fate's jumblings and jugglings would bring forth? He hadn't: and, without any dark and deep desires that Monk's happiness should be filched away from him, he could feel no pleasure in assisting at his triumph.

When Lady Gladys had remarked on Miss Auberon's wonderful luck, he had felt inclined to express the conviction of several years that she was a fool: but of course he hadn't. He was a well-bred, civil brother-in-law: he had only observed, quite politely—

"Ah! ladies always think of the lady's luck: men only think of the man's. I don't know that we thought much of Monk at Eton."

"He's rather capable," Mr. de Braose had observed with judicial candour, "and not, I think, much of a Radical. Miss Auberon *changera tout çela.*"

"Eton! Radicals!" Lady Gladys had scoffed. "What has all that nonsense to do with it? He will have ninety thousand a year: and he's as presentable as any man in Rentshire——"

"Llanthamy is *not* in Rentshire," her husband interrupted quite angrily.

"Or in Llanfairthamyshire," Lady Gladys continued, unmoved. "And Sylvia will work them up. She is a genius——"

"And *quite* beautiful," Eustace murmured unguardedly.

"Yes," said his sister-in-law, with a glance at her husband as if she were saying grace. "Quite beautiful. She's the least vain girl I know: but she *is:* and she knows exactly what it is worth. With her looks, and her air (a parson's daughter, but undeniable) and *his* money, she will be leading us all by the nose presently."

"I don't see that at all," said Mr. de Braose, swallowing a grape sooner than he had intended.

"But she will. She's a very clever girl. Ambitious——"

"And I should say her ambition would be satisfied by marrying a man with Monk's property."

"Not it! She's far too clever to think the present position of the Monksbridges anything. She understands it all, as if she'd been born a Duchess: depend upon it she thinks she is obliging them by marrying into the family——"

"Of course, they are nothing," Mr. de Braose interposed with grim complacency.

"And Sylvia knows it as well as you do. Only she will enjoy *making* them something. Had she married a Duke there'd be nothing for her to do; it would be all ready-made. She would be married and done for like any other Duchess——"

"Gladys!" exclaimed Mr. de Braose, as if he thought his wife's expressions less than parliamentary, as they often were. "You run on rather. Miss Auberon marry a Duke!"

"As to that, Boody, she would marry just whom she chose. If she made up her mind to it, she'd be Duchess of Tilbury, and Adelberta and Maria should thank her and Providence that she doesn't care in the least to be their step-mamma."

Mr. de Braose almost shuddered; the mere mention of such things was like talking of the devil, which is always supposed to invite his attentions. Eustace groaned inwardly: here was a girl whom his own sister-in-law thought capable of being a Duchess! and he had not had the pluck to indulge the admiration she had inspired in him at their very first meeting.

"Boody doesn't understand a bit," Lady Gladys confided to him afterwards. "He only thinks of position and all that. I'm sure we ought all to be very grateful to her. She might have married *any* of us—I'm sure your mother thinks so."

Certainly Lady Gladys had her share of the Van Teuffel inconsequence; but, at that moment, her brother-in-law was not so sure of her being a fool.

CHAPTER XXI

Just before tea on that Sunday afternoon Perkin walked in with Hubert Byrne, and I could see at once that Sylvia thought their arrival inopportune. So, I think, did the young men, at all events two of them. Boys of that sort of age are apt to bore young men who have come to see the sister of one of the boys.

Even Mamma felt it awkward: she was very fond of Perkin, and she liked Hubert; she would probably have enjoyed their company quite as well as that of Lord Chevronel and Mr. de Braose had she and I been alone; as it was she did not know what to do with them. Mr. Monk greeted Perkin with the cordiality due to a hypothetic brother-in-law, and tried to look as if nothing of the kind was in his mind. Lord Chevronel looked as if he would like to be giving Sylvia's brother a handsome tip on his departure for a distant seat of learning. Sylvia herself was almost regretting that her choice had fallen on a school so near home.

As soon as decency permitted I (a good-natured person, though of no consequence) threw myself into the breach.

"Perkin," I said in a loud aside, "I want to talk secrets. Come out into the garden."

Though I cannot defend the practice in general, I winked, and Perkin said—

"All right. Come along, Hubs."

And we "saved ourselves" (as I had recently gathered from Mademoiselle was the French, and significant, expression). We did it by a window, and Mr. de Braose took advantage of it and followed us.

"I don't believe in the secrets," he explained apologetically.

"No. There aren't any," I confessed ingenuously. "But we three were in the way, and I determined on flight. I would have brought Mamma too, if I could."

Eustace was in that depressed frame of mind that leads people to be unusually complacent to the unimportant members of a family; it was my striking inferiority to Sylvia that drew him my way—and Perkin's. She was our sister, and we had nothing in common with her serene and prosperous superiority.

He was rather nice to Perkin, and disposed to treat me as a poultice—homely but soothing. I was flattered.

"I remember so well," he observed, when we were a little way from the house, and the two boys had disappeared somewhere, "the day you came to see my mother."

We were walking by the river in full view of Island Court, so that his remark was not unnatural.

"Oh yes. So do I," said I, in my matter-of-fact way—remembering perfectly that he had not had two words to throw to me.

Perhaps he also recalled the circumstance, for he had slightly glanced at me and was able to note that the bud of my inferiority to Sylvia had burst into full and legitimate bloom. I think it cheered him. If I had been a proper twin, hardly distinguishable apart from my wonderful sister, I shouldn't have been of the slightest use as a poultice. I should have been equally beautiful, which would have distracted his attention, and equally clever, and then he could not have soliloquized.

"It seems," he said, "a long while ago."

"Nineteen months. A year and seven months," I suggested with all my striking originality.

The most conscientious historian need not detail every conversation, and ours was conducted throughout on these lines. He sighed a little, and was disposed to reminiscence; I did not sigh, but verified dates and advanced no ambitious claims to individual existence apart from my brilliant sister. I think he found my stupidity restful.

"Is that handsome boy's surname Hubbs?" he asked, with languid interest, as Perkin and his friend reappeared on the horizon.

"Oh no! Hubert Byrne is his name. Perkin has nicknames for everybody. Mamma is Mugs, and I'm Maggles; and Sylvia is Bubs—short for Syllabubs."

My companion shuddered slightly; not that he resented my being called Maggles, or even that our mother was "Mugs" in my brother's homely nomenclature.

"Hubert is the son of Dr. Byrne over in Llanthamy," I added, with my native love of imparting useless information.

"Ah!" said Eustace with gloomy satisfaction, "the Catholic doctor! And the Monksbridges *loathe* Catholics."

"I don't think you're quite right *there,*" said I, asserting myself (since Perkin's friend was concerned, and Perkin's friends were almost a part of him), "Dr. Byrne is their doctor—at least he doctors their servants."

Eustace laughed a little, and I preferred him in his sighing humour. But when Perkin and Hubert came up he was quite nice to both of them.

"I think," I observed, snatching at a yawn with my pocket-handkerchief, and no more catching it there than if it had been a wasp, "it is time to go in. Tea will be ready. Come along, all of us."

"Thank you, Miss Auberon," said Hubert, "I must say good afternoon——"

"Oh, you must come in to tea," I urged, with flaccid hospitality, thinking of Sylvia and Mr. Monk, and Lord Chevronel.

"No," Perkin put in, brusquely, "he's not coming to tea to-day. I'm going to tea with *him*."

Dear Perkin! How well I understood the superiority of his hospitality to mine! No friend of his should ever feel at our table that any one in our home wished him away.

"But," I urged weakly, "you must be at church, Perkin."

On Sunday evenings all the Cardinal's boys had to be in their place in the choir.

"That'll be all right. Church is not till half-past six; and it's not five yet."

"I'll shoot him off in time," said Hubert, with the entrancing smile that showed all his good-natured teeth.

"They're nice boys," said Mr. de Braose as the two lads went off. And I was pleased with him for saying so.

"Perkin and I have always been chums," I explained, with a burst of my native tact. He looked at me and evidently understood that I could be no fit "chum" for Sylvia; it was natural that our obvious inferiority should throw Perkin and me together.

"Yes," he said, "I can see that."

And I fancy he pitied Sylvia that her family provided no one *she* could regard as a confidante worthy of her.

He made it so plain that I was rather nettled on Perkin's account.

"My brother," I observed warmly, "is the only one of us who inherits papa's cleverness. They think—the Warden and all of them—that he will be very distinguished."

But Mr. de Braose was not really thinking much of Perkin.

"Ah!" he said politely. Then, after a pause that nearly brought us to the verandah, "I wonder if I ought to congratulate you? Perhaps you will think I hardly know you well enough. And I dare say you do not feel that the prospect of losing your sister is much of a matter for congratulation."

I was glad we were so near the window. "Oh, but," I said hurriedly, "if she likes it!" And I dived into the drawing-room with the sound of a sigh over my shoulder.

"Perkin," I announced, "has gone away to tea with Hubert——"

"Hubert?" queried Sylvia, as if she hardly recalled the name, or thought my use of it needlessly intimate.

"Yes, Hubert Byrne. And he has promised to fire Perkin off in good time for church."

"But not to go himself," Lord Chevronel noted with his neat little smile.

"The Byrnes," Eustace explained, "are Roman Catholics."

"But such a nice boy," dear Mamma pleaded in mitigation of sentence. "You'd never think he was; though certainly he crosses himself. But that, of course, is merely habit."

Sylvia looked as if she thought it a habit one should break oneself of. And, to change the subject, perhaps, said—

"*We* must go to church, too. But not for a long time yet."

When the time came Mr. Monk decided that he also must go to church—and so did Lord Chevronel; I wished Mr. de Braose would decide that he had to return to Monkspark, as I thought I had poulticed him enough. But he could not leave his guests, and so all six of us went to church. Sylvia was not sorry that the two young men from Monkspark were added to our party, for it made Mr. Monk's presence with us less striking.

CHAPTER XXII

The evening service was held in the huge choir of the Priory Church, which was almost cut off from the nave by a high screen on the top of which was the organ. There was a pulpit in the choir as well as the bigger one down in the nave, and the screen of carved oak, nearly black, matched the stalls that ran round three sides of the chancel. Six of these stalls, facing the altar, formed part of the screen itself. Next the door, on the left as you entered, sat the Vicar in what had been the Prior's place, next him was Mrs. Hawthorn, and, beyond her, their daughter. To the right of the entrance sat the Warden, Mrs. FitzSimon, and the curate.

We sat in similar stalls on the same level, and near us were the Baroness, the Stephen Rumbles, and Mr. Bloom: all the other upper stalls, on that side and opposite, were occupied by other Monksbridgers of credit and renown.

The Masters of Abbot's School and the Cardinal's or gown-boys sat under us in lower stalls, and below them the rest of the schoolboys, and the men singers of the choir.

In the open space between the two high rows of seats was a tomb, enclosed under a canopy with arched sides filled with strong but beautiful wrought-iron work, through which one could see the recumbent figure within. It was that of Cardinal de Belesme, who, as Abbot of Monksbridge, had founded the neighbouring school; and it represented him as if lying in state in his red robes and hat.

It was the twentieth day of the month (as the Vicar announced, at the beginning of the psalms, in that odd voice which I was always glad he reserved for sacred occasions), and presently they were singing that lovely poem of David's all about the wild creatures God has made.

The singing at the Priory Church was quite beautiful, and, from the first moment I heard it, I always began to have that queer feeling about my chest as if I had been coming down in a swing. You heard it before the choir appeared at all, for they sang something in the vestry, away in the south transept, and the sound seemed unearthly as it came through that open door far off. Then it sank into silence and you only heard the measured cadence of their footfalls as the procession passed out into the transept, across it, along the chancel-aisle, and so into the chancel. The town-boys came first, then the red scholars, then the men, and the clergy after them, with the Vicar last of all: in front of him walked his verger, in a dark blue velvet gown, carrying the Lily Verge—a rod of antique silver tipped with the Virgin's flower, which in old days had been borne before the Prior.

Perkin's place was on the opposite side from where we sat, a little nearer the altar, and I could see him very well. I loved to look at him in church. His merry, kindly face was as kind as ever, but sobered a little, and a different light from that of mere good nature beautified it. His eyes held a wonderful quietness and simplicity; and his reverence, in so light-hearted a boy, seemed to me, somehow, touching. He was so absolutely himself, and yet another self of his was half revealed there, as if the Perkin of our home-life, of our chaffing, and little friendly skirmishes, were not all of him. He had no conventional tricks or gestures of piety: he moved and sat still as naturally as at home, but his face had a different meaning as though it were a clear screen that reverently hid something poignant and great. Some of the lads, very few, were careless and not reverent; most had a decent solemnity and restraint; none were like Perkin.

I loved to look at him, and yet I felt half ashamed to watch him—even if he were not to catch me: it seemed mean, as if one were eavesdropping—overhearing something intended for other ears. Perkin was rather tall now, and very manly; it was what you noticed more than his good looks; still he was not young-mannish; just a handsome, strong boy, full of vigour and life. It is odd that, pausing to think of him there, on that Sunday evening, it is the memory of his laugh, though he certainly was not laughing then, that seems to echo most clearly from those far-away days—the exquisite laugh that belonged to out-of-doors and home. No nasty boy could laugh as he did. It came up from his clean, merry heart. . . . Eh, dear! I'm an old woman now, and grown garrulous. I must get back to my story—such as it is. Well, they began that perfect psalm; and I felt as I always felt when I heard it—a strange wistful delight, as if a cold pulse were hitting against my ribs. Of course I listened for Perkin's voice, and tried to separate it from the rest; but the boys sang too well for that—it was only in an anthem, when there were solos, that any single voice stood out from the others. I never could understand why it was so beautiful; much more beautiful than any famous music I heard afterwards in operas or oratorios in London. That later music often astonished my mind, but never gripped my heart; it appealed to a sense of art that I haven't got, but made no cry to myself; besides, I was a girl in those first days at Monksbridge and knew very little—only home and Peterkin.

After the psalm, during the lesson, he sat at first sideways in his stall, facing towards us; but, after a little smile at me, I saw his eyes fall on the Cardinal's tomb, and they had a grave musing in them. Mr. Monk was looking at Sylvia (also sideways). Presently Perkin shifted himself in his seat, and he was looking towards the huge white stone screen behind the altar. In the middle was a carved figure of Christ upon His cross, with arms outstretched, flat and straight. A pious soldier of Cromwell's had broken His legs, as that other pious soldier had once thought to do and had forborne. The whole figure was battered. Ever so many figures filled niches in the screen, and the lower ones had been defaced, but hurriedly; those high up were intact, and among them was one of the English Pope, Adrian IV., one of St. Thomas of Canterbury, one of the Cardinal who helped the Barons at Runnymede, and one of St. Edward the Confessor, with a weeny Westminster Abbey in his hand. I could just see Perkin's face; and it had the same doubtful, wondering expression on it that I had noticed there while he sat looking at the tomb of Cardinal de Belesme.

When the anthem came he was quite different. It was an odd one, taken from Ezekiel, and a fat young man, with a high coppery voice, began with a recitative in which he sang how God carried the prophet into the Valley of Dry Bones. "And, lo," he ended, "they were very dry."

Then another man, in a voice lower and plainer, sang, with a fine quietness and singular expression of doubt, "Son of man, can these dry bones live?"

It was Perkin's voice that replied, "O Lord God, Thou knowest!"

I never felt till then, fully, how exquisite my brother's alto was.

It had no horrible tremolo in it, but it seemed to hit my heart and shake it. Lord Chevronel looked across with a quick air of surprise, and I could see that in a moment he no longer was able to think of Sylvia's brother as a superfluous schoolboy. Mr. Monk was also listening with all his eyes. Only Sylvia was unmoved by any higher emotion than a ladylike gratification.

"O Lord God, Thou knowest." And high, high up among the arches, and in the shadowy roof, echoed that patient, poignant cry.

There was barely a pause before the recitative took up the word, but somehow it seemed intense, a suspense that mere brevity of duration could not deprive of its acuteness.

"Again He said to me," came the recitative, "Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and I will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord."

And now again my brother's voice arose, clear, like a silver bell or trumpet—

"So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above." All this was upon but one or two high notes, sustained without the least shake or tremble; then with almost a sudden drop, like a gasp, came the last words—"But there was no breath in them."

Another incalculably brief but intense pause, and it was Perkin still who sang on—

"Then said He to me, Prophesy unto the wind, son of man, and say to the wind, thus said the Lord God: *Come from the Four Winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live."*

In that last phrase the boy's voice was given, by the music, a larger play, and it rose and swayed and fell, and rose again, like a cool breath of summer gale on a burning day. When he ceased, many other voices took up what he had sung, and repeated it: "Come from the Four Winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live." And Perkin's part in that night's anthem was finished. It was the first man, with the coppery voice, hard and cold and clear, who went on: "And the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army." And this the whole choir repeated.

Outside the Priory door, when church was over, Mr. Monk said to Sylvia—

" You never told us of your brother's singing—he is wonderful."

This was one of the special occasions when I really liked Mr. Monk. We were destined to be brother and sister-in-law, and there was a sort of aloof intimacy between us in time, but we were seldom very sympathetic. He never could regard me as belonging to the same class with Sylvia, and, as I was her sister, he felt it must be my fault. He was more really ambitious than she was, and it slightly annoyed him that I never did anything for our family. For my part I liked his parents better than I liked him, and could never see why my sister's husband should interfere with me—or Perkin. But I liked him now, when he said that to Sylvia.

" He was in better voice to-night than I ever heard him," she answered, with cool satisfaction. " It is the first time I have heard him take a solo."

In better voice! I shot a quick glance at her under the flickering lamp; Lord Chevronel intercepted it. Strange to say, he understood, and I could see that he felt as I did; it was no question of being in better voice. For some reason, though what it was I did not know then, my brother had been strongly *moved* by what he had had to sing.

CHAPTER XXIII

I DID not know then, but I knew soon, for the very next day I saw Perkin alone and began to talk of the anthem. He seemed shy about it, as if he would rather not have talked about it. But I (ever tactful) persisted; and he answered me quite simply.

"Well," he said, "I was in a bad humour when I went to church. I don't care for all our grand friends much; and, when Hubs and I came into the drawing-room, Sylvia made it very plain *she* didn't care for *my* friend, who isn't grand at all. Of course I wouldn't bring him in to tea to be tolerated or ignored; but I had brought him to tea, and he knew it very well. So when we went off to his house I felt mean and savage. Don't you think he's quite as good a gentleman as Mr. Monk, or Lord Chevronel, or Eustace de Braose?"

"Of course, Perkin."

"So do I. And so he is. But Sylvia would have been lofty and 'gracious': I couldn't stand that; so off we went. Then I had to go to church: and of course he couldn't come——"

"But, Perkin, that's his fault, if anybody's; Sylvia wouldn't mind his coming to church with you—only he won't because he's a Roman Catholic."

"I know that. I wasn't thinking any more of Sylvia. It has nothing to do with her. But it seemed such a shame—the whole thing. Here am I receiving the education Cardinal de Belesme left the money to pay for—and Hubert, who belongs to his church, not eligible to receive it, because he *does* belong to the Cardinal's church. I've taken the Cardinal's Prize, and Hubert could have gained it, twice as well as I could—only he's a Catholic, like the Founder, so he may not. I am in for the college scholarship—and I shall win it—but Hubert could win it better than I can; only he must not, because he belongs to the same religion as the Cardinal who founded it. The subjects the Founder laid down for the candidates to pass in were these: there were to be four theses—on the Doctrine of Transsubstantiation; on the Immaculate Conception of God's Mother; on the Primacy of Peter; on Purgatory. Of course that is all changed. Since the Reformation the candidates have to pass in Classics, Mathematics, History, and Astronomy; even in those Hubert could do better than I can: because *he* could really pass in the subjects laid down by the Founder, and believes about them what the Founder believed, he is not eligible! I thought of it all, as I walked back to college, and while we were putting on our surplices in the vestry. I was thinking of it still during the first lesson, and at last I couldn't stand looking at the Cardinal's tomb, and thinking of it: there he lies, I mean his alabaster portrait, just as if he were lying in state, a dead Cardinal, in Cardinal's dress; the man who founded our school and meant it to be for those who belong to the religion that has Cardinals—and none of them may get any benefit from it. *We* can, because we belong to a different religion that won't hear of the things he believed and wanted to have taught for ever. His teachers were to be priests, and to say Masses for ever for his soul, and the souls of all the abbots and monks of Marybridge—and no one who would or could say Masses for the dead may teach in his school. No one who believes what the abbot believed who founded the Priory Church may preach in it, or sing in it, or baptize in it, or give Holy Communion in it. So I couldn't stand thinking of it all, and looking at the Cardinal's tomb. It seemed such a theft, and such a cheat—and I am receiving the stolen goods. So I turned my back to the Cardinal and looked at the altar, and there was the same thing to be seen. Adrian IV., who was a monk and an abbot, a Cardinal, and then a Pope: he also taught just what Cardinal de Belesme taught. And St. Thomas of Canterbury: and St. Augustine (whom a Pope sent here): and all of them—regular Roman Catholics, like Hubert. And there was the big, battered Crucifix: the stone portrait of Jesus Christ—the Roman Catholics don't smash His statues to show their reverence for Him. The whole Priory is a Roman Catholic building, built for Mass and for singing the Office the Roman Catholics sing still—but they mustn't use it, because they would use it for the things it was meant for: and it is ours because we don't believe in those things."

"But, Perkin, when it came to the anthem you weren't in a bad humour?"

"You can't think of two things at once—not exactly. And I had to think of what I had to sing. But it joined on. It seemed to me that all the old Cathedrals, and Abbeys, and priories, and parish churches, up and down England, were the Valley of Dry Bones. They had been alive once. And *our* friends came along and killed them, and made dry bones of them. Could anything make them come to life again? Can anything?"

And, as he said this, I heard the echo of his voice, high up among the arches; that patient, poignant cry "O Lord God, Thou knowest."

I really could not say anything: because I hardly knew what he meant, and had an uneasy feeling that it was something none of us would like. Nor did he say anything more for a little while, but walked quickly up and down the room with his hands in his pockets, his red gown flung off and thrown across a chair.

Presently he went on. "You see, the dry bones did come to life before. Nobody knows exactly when or how Christianity came here: perhaps it was brought from Rome, from the very house where St. Paul lodged with the Senator Pudens and his wife Claudia, while he and St. Peter were still alive, or soon after St. Paul writes about Pudens and Claudia to St. Timothy; and the Christian tradition makes Claudia, the wife of Cornelius Pudens, the daughter of a British prince or king. And the heathen poet Martial in one place mentions that the noble Roman Pudens married Claudia, a foreign lady: in another place he says she was a Briton. Tacitus, a heathen like Martial, tells of a British King, called Cogidunus, in the Emperor Claudius' reign, who was rewarded for faithfulness to Rome by the grant of certain lands, and it is known now that King Cogidunus added the Emperor's names to his own, and called himself on his coins Tiberius Claudius Cogidunus. His daughter would be called Claudia, in Roman fashion: and I believe that the Claudia whom the Christians said was daughter of a British King was daughter of Cogidunus: we know she was wife of Pudens and a Christian, well known to St. Paul, and she must have been well known to St. Peter too, for it was in her house that he said Mass, using the altar part of which is still there, in the oratory that formed part of the house of Pudens. The authority King Cogidunus had from Claudius continued in his family, and his descendant King Lucius was, it seems, a Christian; as if Claudia had brought or sent the faith to her family. If Lucius was not a baptized Christian, he was a Christian in sympathy, for he sent a letter to Pope Eleutherius in the year 156 by the hands of two men, whom some call Fagan and Dervan, praying to be made Christian by an act of his authority. And the Pope ordained the King's messengers, and sent them back to preach to the Britons, and establish the Church here as it was in the other countries: and they did it, so that in Pope Sylvester's time, British Bishops of York, London and Lincoln took part in his Council of Arles. So you see, Mags, that the old dry bones of the heathen temples here were given life, and the life came from Rome."

I rubbed my nose to express a suspension of judgment, and Perkin dashed on.

"And the British Church flourished, like the other churches abroad; and was evidently just like them, joining in their Councils and all that: only the Church here was left more in peace, because the heathen emperors were farther off, and their power was shaky here. But persecution came all right under Diocletian; and then came the Saxons, and Angles, and the rest of them; and the Britons and their Christianity were driven west into the hills, into Wales and into Cornwall, and England began—and was heathen, and there were dry bones again, scorched bones, all that the heathen left of the British churches. But they were to live again: the Benedictine monk, Pope Gregory, sent the Benedictine monk St. Augustine, and Christianity, that came from Rome to the Britons, came again from Rome to the English. For a thousand years the Catholic Church went on, building all our cathedrals, our old parish churches, and abbeys and priories—like ours here. That's why in the altar-screen there is the statue of St. Eleutherius, and the statue of St. Gregory the Great, and St. Augustine's, and all the rest of them. It was thinking of all this that first made me mad to think Hubert's religion can have no share in the Cardinal's school, or in the priory the Benedictine monks built, and the Cardinal rebuilt . . . and"—he paused a moment, and ended more hurriedly—" and I was thinking of all this when I had to sing ' O Lord God, Thou knowest '—whether these dry bones can live again. They're dry enough, anyway."

CHAPTER XXIV

Of course all this talk of Perkin's gave me something to think of; though I do not believe I even suspected then what it was to lead to, or that it would lead to anything in particular. He always said out, to me, any special thing he had in his mind, and in general nothing came of it. Sometimes he talked like a violent radical, and then he would rave against the rebels who had cut off Charles I.'s head, or the revolutionists who killed Louis XVI. and his queen, and multitudes of others, all in the name of liberty and brotherhood. Whatever it was he was eager, burning, and unrestrained. He had a perfect passion for justice, and everything he thought unjust made him furious. But, though I supposed this new vehemence would be like all his other vehemence, still I could not help wondering, rather grimly, what the Warden would think if he knew what Perkin's "historical bias" (to borrow a metaphor of the bowling green) had led him to. Perkin was quite capable of telling him. I could only hope he wouldn't—and picture the Doctor's face, and Mr. Hawthorn's, if my brother should scold them for keeping Roman Catholics out of the Cardinal's school in the Benedictines' priory. I had, however, other things to think of; anything *really* concerning Perkin interested me more than matters that concerned any one else; but these ideas of his would probably have no important consequences, whereas Sylvia's concerns were of family importance.

"My dear," said Miss Belvoir, when I met her, a few days after that Sunday evening (which in my own mind I always call the Dry Bones Sunday) in her Bath-chair, "I wish you would come to tea to-day; it's not a party, there'll be no one else. But this change of the season always tries me, and I'm not quite so well. Do come and cheer me."

She invited me with such guileless cordiality that I said at once I would go. And, about four o'clock, I walked off to English Gate. She greeted me with special warmth, and there was a fire, which made her grim and gaunt drawing-room look a warmer welcome too. For my part I thought that room slightly too medieval for mere comfort.

"I was so afraid," said Miss Belvoir, settling me into the best chair, "that Mrs. Auberon would not be able to spare you."

"Oh, Mamma and Sylvia are at Llanthamy; Mr. Monk fetched them before luncheon, and they won't be back till dressing-time."

"Ah! at Llanthamy Castle!" said Miss Belvoir, pretending to poke the fire. "My dear, are we to congratulate you? From what I hear I think I may congratulate you."

"On what?" I asked with guilty innocence.

Then Miss Belvoir put down the poker and turned round—that she might see my face, though of course it enabled me to see hers. And I felt sure I knew why she had invited me so pressingly to tea, and why she had asked no one else. When I said "On what?" she glanced at me with a reproachful air, and looked particularly like a male Belvoir; her frigidity was quite gentlemanly.

"I see," she observed, as if she were seated on the jutting promontory of an iceberg, and looking down on me, tittupping up and down in a cock-boat without any oars, "that I was—er—precipitate." And she gave a chemical sort of sound to her words. "We were, evidently, misinformed—Miss Auberon is *not* engaged to Mr. Monk."

I am sorry to be driven to so many metaphors, but the effect of her last sentence I felt to be thumbscrewy.

"But," I said feebly, "who told you she *was* engaged to him?"

"No, my dear! The report being without foundation, it is useless to trace it to its source. I shall contradict it."

When I saw how great her firmness and decision were I wondered how the Belvoir estates could belong to any one else, with so determined a male Belvoir extant to support her claim.

"I shall contradict it," she added inexorably. "I need not mention on what authority; but I shall contradict it."

She evidently meant *my* authority, and I succumbed to the thumbscrew.

"But, Miss Belvoir, I don't see why you should contradict it——" I was beginning, when she tripped me up.

"Because I may have helped to spread the false report—it was told me as a certain thing; and after seeing him with your sister in church on Sunday evening I may have given currency to the confounded rumour."

"Oh!" I cried, with timorous pleasantry, "at church! There were *three* gentlemen at church with us; they couldn't *all* be supposed to have come because they were engaged to Sylvia."

"No," said Miss Belvoir, with unsmiling dignity; "but there were *three ladies also.*"

Then I laughed. "And I suppose Lord Chevronel is going to marry Mamma, and I am going to marry Eustace de Braose!" I suggested, aiming at a *reductio ad absurdum.*

Miss Belvoir smiled tightly, and shook her head, but not as if disclaiming the absurdity of the notion. I became quite desperate.

"The truth is," I blurted out, "I really can't tell you if Sylvia is engaged or not."

Then Miss Belvoir relaxed a little. "You mean," she said, less austerely, "that you are not at liberty to tell—pray forgive my—my interest in your family——"

"I mean that I don't know."

Miss Belvoir almost stared, but relaxed a little more.

"Yes. No; I *don't* know. All the same I wouldn't contradict it, if I were you," I mumbled.

"You wouldn't?"

And now Miss Belvoir relaxed a good deal, and moved her chair a trifle nearer, with a glance at the window as if she were merely edging out of a draught.

"No," I said, making a clean breast of it. "I don't see any use in contradicting it. For though nothing was settled when last my sister spoke of it, I believe it *will* be settled. Perhaps it would be best to say nothing either way, since I may be wrong."

"My dear, I will hold my tongue." And I saw she would; while resenting being kept in the dark herself she had no objection to Monksbridge at large remaining without authentic information. "It is a great marriage," she went on thoughtfully, with a pensive interest. "But not at all above what your sister is entitled to. With her beauty (of course you resemble her, my dear, but *her* beauty is quite special)——"

"We're not in the least alike!" I protested.

"Oh, there's a family resemblance. But Miss Auberon's beauty is of a rare quality—quite. And with her great distinction and talents, and her consciousness of her claims, and the company she sees—for you mix in very high company since you came into our neighbourhood" (and here Miss Belvoir's relaxation was slightly curbed), "I understand she is going to stay at the Duke's, and also at Lord Closeborough's, where she is pretty sure to meet the Marquess—Lord Severn is constantly there, and very likely the Duke of Menevia, and Lord Wrekin; probably, if she were not already engaged, some even more brilliant alliance might offer."

I winced and felt myself reddening while she talked of our fine company "since we came into her neighbourhood." I could picture Perkin's angry annoyance if he had heard her. But she relaxed again and seemed half pleased as she said, "Mind: it is a great marriage—but I think Mr. Monk is a wise man, and lucky. He will have the loveliest wife in the two counties—in the Principality I should say: and the next Lady Monksbridge will be all that his family needs—distinguished, and a great Social Leader. Poor dear Lady Monksbridge—that now is—no one could call her distinguished, or a social anybody."

Then tea was brought in, and we had it there in the drawing-room, instead of having to go off to the guard-room—where, perhaps, there was not another fire. And over our muffin we waxed quite tender.

"They're the first of the season," said Miss Belvoir, "I never begin them before fires. Yes, it's a great marriage; and *every* marriage among one's own little circle is—well, it stirs up one's—not exactly memories, for I never actually was married." And she sighed as she glanced covertly at the left corner of the chimney-piece. The kettle-holder, embroidered in beads, the Belvoir arms on a "filoselle" ground, hung there; and over it a miniature in a flat, black frame. I knew it represented a gentleman, with peepy eyes, like Henry VIII.'s, and a pink cheek and a half, and a blue-grey chin, and hair that expressed a surmise less wild than that of Cortes, though I should say the gentleman was also stout.

"We all grow old in time," said Miss Belvoir, a little shiny about the mouth (but that was muffin) and perhaps about the eyes (and that wasn't).

"Oh yes, indeed," I murmured, with so elderly an air of acquiescence that it didn't strike Miss Belvoir as a fault in tact.

"But I was giddy once," she went on, absent-mindedly, salting her muffin, out of a little silver acorn. And it made *me* giddy to hear her say so.

"Are you sure?" I was going to protest, but saved myself, and sighed into my cup instead—with another glance at Henry VIII.—or Cortes, so to speak.

"Yes," said Miss Belvoir, "that is he." I had guessed as much, but didn't say so.

"Was it like him?" I enquired, now openly regarding the portrait.

"It never did justice to his commanding expression."

(That I could believe.) “He might have been almost anything”—(that also seemed possible)—“a leader of men” (that, the miniaturist had, I thought, failed to convey).

I merely sighed, because Miss Belvoir sighed, while she put a little cream and a good deal of milk into my second cup.

“Yes, I see it now,” she confessed. “I might have seen it then. But I was young.”

She glanced at me, and I nodded entire assent—she must have been young once.

“. . . and admired——”

Her glance was not removed, and I nodded more forcibly.

“. . . and giddy.”

I nodded again, but entirely on trust.

“Yes, my dear. And young, admired, giddy as I was, I hardly realized his latent powers. He *had,* of course, a slight limp——”

(Why “of course”?) But I only nodded once more.

“I thought it a disfigurement: Sir Walter Scott limped, but I never thought then of the peculiarities of genius, and I think it prejudiced me. Also he—no, not stammered” (I felt certain from the miniature that he did), “but there was a certain hesitancy in his speech, like Demosthenes—or was it Socrates? And I made light of it—like some giddy Athenian youth, as I was. And tho’ papa wished it, and his own wife——”

I jumped instead of nodding, but Miss Belvoir fortunately was gazing at Cortes, and didn’t notice.

“. . . his own wife on her death-bed had advised him to re-marry. He almost urged that on me: in the light of a duty. But I said 'No.' And, since, I have felt my responsibility. A giddy girl's responsibility is very great. *He* (I am sure) knew his powers, tho' latent; with me (as he put it) 'to jog him up,' he might have developed them. As it was they were—buried."

Her tone was so truly sepulchral that I asked, not unnaturally, "Did he die soon?"

The idea of the gentleman with the peepy eyes and the indigo hair, dying of a broken heart for the giddy Miss Belvoir was difficult, but touching.

"Die? my dear: perhaps I should not have told you of the past (since it was his also, and not exclusively mine). But I thought you recognized him. Mr. Gwent—Hudibras Gwent, he was to me, though now no more so."

Mr. Gwent! I knew him well by sight. He was the coroner, and his grandson was at school with Perkin: a gentleman with white hair (what there was of it; and it looked a good deal till he took his hat off) and several chins; and a "presence" in excess of his height. Certainly he limped—on one crutch, in fact.

I gasped.

"He married Tabitha Lloyd, an inferior woman, though not ill-looking, and between three and four thousand pounds; not five, as people say: under that upas tree his abeyant powers have become extinct."

Miss Belvoir might fetch her metaphors from nature (or poetry) but her language was influenced by her heraldic bias. She spoke, I thought, with a gloomy exultation of the upas tree, and of Mr. Gwent's powers being extinct under it, like a peerage. "But," she concluded, rising and going to a cupboard, "I was godmother to their eldest daughter, and that's why she is called Adeliza; they have no family names of their own, and are mostly called out of the Bible, her Lloyds are no particular Lloyds, you understand."

Miss Belvoir unlocked the cupboard and produced thence mulberry cordial, in which we pledged Sylvia. Miss Belvoir had a mulberry-tree in her garden, and sent us all presents of the fruit when it condescended to bear any, which was about once in three years. In return we sent her peaches. At Monksbridge there was a lively exchange of such presents—as the Baroness had informed us on her first visit.

"I shall feel that now," she had remarked, "that I have no garden to send anybody anything."

But she would have felt it more if Miss Belvoir had given over sending mulberries, and Mr. Bloom no longer sent grapes, and we had not risen to our duty and contributed peaches.

"Yes," Miss Belvoir said, with a slow shake of her head, sipping her cordial, "a girl has a great responsibility. On her ill-considered decisions so much may depend. Your sister recognizes that. I understand her. In marrying Lord Monksbridge's heir she is not merely pleasing her own idle fancy, but devoting herself to a life-work, to the playing of an important *rôle*. Here's success to her." I was going to add "and happiness," but my mulberry cordial went "the wrong way," and I could only nod as I gulped down my choke.

CHAPTER XXV

When Mrs. FitzSimon called next day on purpose to tell Miss Belvoir that Sylvia Auberon was undoubtedly engaged to Mr. Monk, she found that lady dignified and mysterious.

"I fancy," said Miss Belvoir, "that I know almost as much as anybody of the actual position of affairs."

"Well, the condition is that they are engaged."

"It may be so," Miss Belvoir conceded, with a cool condescension.

"Oh, but it *is*. Mrs. Auberon told me. She told me this morning. There's no secret about it, though Miss Auberon does not wish the marriage to take place immediately."

Miss Belvoir looked annoyed, chiefly, perhaps, with the younger Miss Auberon, who seemed to have deceived her.

"It was only settled yesterday—at Llanthamy Castle. He proposed ten days ago, but she only consented yesterday," added Mrs. FitzSimon.

Then Miss Belvoir absolved me, though she was not pleased with Mrs. FitzSimon for having public and authentic information before her.

"What a marriage for her!" cried the Warden's lady: "I never could see anything special in her."

"Couldn't you? Then I suspect you're the only person in the country who couldn't. I don't know that it is a *great* marriage for her,—would you be surprised to hear that she might have married a Duke if she had cared to try for one?"

"Good gracious!" And at last Mrs. FitzSimon began to feel that something in Miss Auberon had escaped her.

"An intimate friend of mine," said Miss Belvoir, alluding thus darkly to Lady Llantwddwy, "a peeress—assures me that she knows the Duke and all his family, and that if Sylvia had been that scheming sort of girl she might easily have been a Duchess."

"Dear me! She'll be walking over us all when she is married," said Mrs. FitzSimon, with sudden respect.

"I don't fancy you'll see much of her when she's married," Miss Belvoir declared, anxious to punish the Warden's wife for having known more than she did. "You'll find that her sphere will be entirely among the great."

Mrs. FitzSimon did not like that at all. Her father was Dean of Lambeth, and went to Court with loyal assiduity; any caller at Warden's Lodge might read his name, while waiting the descent of Mrs. FitzSimon to her drawing-room, in a *Morning Post* casually left about for a week or two after each of these occasions; she considered him to be "O Mew" with his Sovereign.

"Sylvia," Miss Belvoir added, "is already engaged to stay at the Duke's, and at Lord Closeborough's, the most important houses in the county. Such visits lead inevitably to others. She will be little seen in our local society, I fancy."

"It will be very advantageous for Marjory," Mrs. FitzSimon observed, willing to leave the immediate consideration of Miss Auberon's coming splendour, "and she needs assistance. She would never make her own way much. She has her brother's easiness of disposition, and is ready to be intimate anywhere. And she has not the boy's talent—the Warden thinks him likely to be distinguished, and with all this influence he may be pushed up anywhere—he won't push *himself;* he has no Emulation."

"Ah," said Miss Belvoir, "the next Lady Monksbridge will see to all that. *Her* marriage won't be the end of the story."

And Miss Belvoir looked as if she knew so much that she sent her visitor away (without any mulberry cordial) depressed by the suspicion that Sylvia Auberon's engagement was only one item in a whole as to which she, Mrs. FitzSimon, could only indulge in barren conjecture.

I think I received more congratulations than Sylvia. She had not my way of pattering about the town, and was not so easily seen. When our neighbours called she was often invisible, and very soon we had to report her as away. For she went to the Duke's (by "the Duke" we always meant, at Monksbridge, the Duke of Tilbury), and thence to Lady Closeborough, only returning home for two days, when she carried Mamma away to the Duke of Menevia's at Caerleon Palace. Even when my sister was at home, and to be seen, no one said a great deal to her, or kissed her; but I was embraced on all hands, and received volleys of congratulations. Mr. Monk was not much mentioned; he was merely implied in the brilliance of Sylvia's meritorious achievement, as if he had been an opulent territory conquered by her prowess. Hardly any one spoke of her happiness, or of his; that would have done very well if she had been a nursery-governess marrying a pleasant young bank clerk.

" How does it make you feel? " Perkin asked me, hotly, one day when a party of congratulators had just departed. Mamma and Sylvia were away, and he was staying at home to take care of me. " It makes *me* feel as if we were all snobs together. I hope to goodness you'll never marry anybody in particular."

" Nobody in particular wants to marry me."

" Ah! but Sylvia has carted Mugs off this time. Next time she goes a-Duking *you'll* be taken—and *then* you'll see. I never saw such a girl! She never thinks of herself—I wouldn't mind so much if she would be selfish, and just marry her own swells and be content. But not she. She doesn't care a rap for herself, or for Hampden Monk either; it's only families she thinks of: his family and ours. If he had five sisters, she'd insist on Dukes marrying them all."

" I don't believe there are five unmarried Dukes in England," I objected, with my incurable insistence on literal facts.

" Then she'd make five Dukes divorce their wives and marry the five Miss Monks. As for us—there'll be no peace for us."

" Why there's only Mamma and me."

" And isn't that enough? If Mugs comes back a Marchioness-elect, you'll see I was right. And you'll follow She can't marry *me* to anybody, but she'll arrange my future."

"You're to be a bishop—so you're safe for a good while. Even Sylvia can't get you made a bishop at sixteen-and-a-half."

" *That* she shan't. I don't intend to be a parson at all, and if she thinks I shall, she has made *one* mistake, anyway."

If Hubert Byrne had been setting Perkin against being a clergyman I thought it rather naughty of him, but for once held my tongue tactfully.

When Mamma and Sylvia came home, I found that Perkin had been to some extent a true prophet. Sylvia had accepted an invitation, not to a Duke's, but to Lord Severn's, and I was to go with her. And the Marquess of Severn was so tremendous that it was currently believed he would regard the offer of a dukedom as an insult; and the Ladies Salop never married young unless they married Dukes. Between forty and fifty they were apt to become Archdeaconesses.

"You see," Sylvia explained, "Hampden is going too; and I cannot be staying about where he is without Mamma or you."

"Why *not* Mamma?" I asked fretfully.

"Well," my sister answered, with perfect calmness and temper, "it is partly a question of dress. Nearly the same people will be at Lord Severn's as we have just met at the Duke of Menevia's; and they would remember her dresses. There would not be time to have a couple of new ones made for Mamma, and ladies of her time of life cannot dress in tarlatan and book-muslin as you can; their dress has to be handsomer and more costly. I'm sorry if it bores you, but you will have to get used to it, and you may just as well begin at once. After all, you'll find it rather amusing—it is rather amusing comparing these people with our excellent Miss Belvoirs and Mrs. FitzSimons. You're observant in your way, and I think it will amuse you."

"*I* prefer Miss Belvoirs," I said doggedly.

"As to that," Sylvia pointed out, with her customary reasonableness, "you can't tell till you've seen the other people. I think I prefer the other people—she's a decent old woman, but rather prehistoric."

"I like her better than Lady Llantwddwy."

"I've no objection; I don't care sixpence for either of them. I dare say they're much of a muchness. The fact is, Lady Llantwddwy has spent so many years being toadied by middle-class people that she has become rather middle-class herself. She stays at home too much. If she went about she would not care for Monksbridge gossip."

And here I may as well say that Sylvia, with all her faculty for picking up information, never gossiped or seemed to listen to gossip. And also I felt constrained to admit to myself that her visits to these big houses had, somehow, improved her. She still got her own way, and managed us all, but the tinge of overbearingness she used to have at our first coming to Monksbridge, had disappeared. She had never been loud, but now she seemed gentle; and her manners were perfect—though I could have done with much less of them. Her power of assimilation was marvellous, and, without copying any one, she had a faultless instinct for the best models. I resented her Dukes and Marquesses with much of Perkin's irritable annoyance, nevertheless I perceived that among them all she had been meeting some nice people.

I was a little inquisitive as to how Mamma had enjoyed herself, and slightly disappointed, perhaps, to find that she had enjoyed herself more than we (Perkin and I) had thought probable.

"Oh," she told me, "Caerleon is a most beautiful place; my bedroom was delightful, with the loveliest view down a glade in the park, and deer in it. And they were very kind people. The Duchess of Menevia reminds me so of a Mrs. Bodger we knew (your dear papa and I) at Dulleigh Magna with a hare-lip, though the Duchess hasn't one—only a slight moustache, and you can't see it with her veil on. A very good woman, and so simple. You can see she has been a beauty, and really handsome still, but no beauty airs, and no fine-lady airs either. She came to my room once, and we sat and talked of you having had so many diseases one after another, and she said that was just like Tighty (they call Lady Gwendoline 'Tighty').

" 'Tighty always caught everything,' she said, 'and Bo and Gaby never did.' They call Lord St. Botulph (the eldest son) Bo, and Gaby is their pet-name for Lady Gladws. I told her of Tribb's Emollient for sore throat, and she took the receipt down on the back of an envelope for her grandchildren. Lady Gladws is married and the Duchess says, 'her girl is croupy in foggy weather.' And she was so sympathetic talking of your dear papa. 'I know what it is,' she said, 'to lose a young husband,' which surprised me rather, for the Duke is nearly seventy, and looks quite healthy; but it seems she was a widow when he married her (and only a Mrs. Colonel Shorthose of the Guards). But oh, Marjory, don't tell Sylvia I said Mrs. Colonel Shorthose—it was a slip of the tongue; it's very vulgar to say 'Mrs. Admiral,' or 'Mrs. General So-and-So' now, though it wasn't thought so when I was a girl. And Sylvia was quite charming all the time. She never fussed about me, or seemed to be hanging about to see I did everything properly; and yet she was always there if I wanted her, and was so devoted and affectionate, just like that nice Lady Geraldine Cumberland to *her* mother, Lady Solway. Another sweet woman. She and Lady Severn are sisters, and both married Marquesses, but they're as nice—they might be doctors' wives, or clergymen's. Indeed, Lady Severn seems to care more for her poor people than any clergyman's wife I ever knew, and she likes talking about them better than anything; and Lady Solway would talk for ever of *her* poor people, especially of their diseases—and she must nearly ruin the doctors in her neighbourhood (only, of course, they generally have club-doctors), for she knows exactly how to cure everything herself. They are twins, like you and Sylvia, and when I mentioned it, Lady Solway was thoroughly interested, especially to hear that you and Sylvia are not like each other; for Lady Severn is dark and tall, and certainly handsome, whereas Lady Solway is shortish and of a full habit, with her chest rather high up (like that Mrs. Grebbers at Burlton), so that it gets crumby, I noticed, at breakfast, and her face is large and whitish, with hair of no special colour, and a long lip, and big pale ears. There was a landlady at Blackpool (where you had chicken-pox, and she charged it in the bill, even your papa confessed, though she put it down as breakages and depreciation of furniture) just like her, but a totally different sort of woman. Lady Solway would be sympathy itself, and really generous, though anything but extravagant. Her dress was as plain——'With five daughters to dress, and six sons to put out in life, *I* can't afford to be smart, Mrs. Auberon,' she told me. And she was as proud as Punch of a royal-blue velvet she'd had dyed black. ' I diddled McTavish out of it, I'm afraid,' she said (meaning her maid), ' and I did feel rather mean; but I gave her five pounds conscience-money to make up for it.' The elderly people were all very nice, except a Miss Grogram with half a million of money (from pills, I think), who didn't seem to care much for any one without a title. I rather made up to her the first night, as Sylvia had told me her father had been a butler who patented an embrocation—it was embrocation, not pills. But she didn't take any interest, and gaped when I talked about Perkin, and asked if I was to be at the Duke's on the twenty-ninth; and when I said, ' What Duke's? ' she said, ' Oh, the Duke of Ipswich's.' And when I told her this was the only Duke's I had stayed at, she said, 'Quite so,' and smiled, as if I'd confessed to being quite vulgar."

CHAPTER XXVI

Sylvia was extremely amiable in those days and made quite a little speech to thank me for not refusing to go with her to Lord Severn's.

"I had to say yes or no when Lady Severn asked me to bring you," she explained. "I had myself refused at first, because it would not be convenient for Mamma to take me, and she said at once, 'But we hear of your sister; you and your sister must come together. I quite approve of your not choosing to go about to houses where Mr. Monk is staying without one of your own family coming with you. Do let it be settled that we are to expect you and your sister on the ninth.' So I accepted for us both, and it is very nice of you not to object. No doubt you think it a bore; but, you see, Marjory, I do not choose to be separated from my family. There's a Miss Frilling one meets everywhere, and she never has any mother or sister or brother or anybody with her; she is quite intimate everywhere. But you can see that she is looked upon as quite different from the girls who come with their mothers and sisters; and she talks more to the young men than to any of the girls. That would not do for me at all; I do not choose to be regarded just as the Miss Auberon whom Lord Monksbridge's son is marrying. I am only one of the Auberons, and people must understand that I and my family are all one. No one shall say of me, 'Oh, Sylvia Auberon! Yes; you see her everywhere. She's marrying Lord Monksbridge's son—I never heard of her people.' I should not care in the least to marry if it put me and my family in different—what's the word?—not catalogues—categories."

Perkin was quite right. Sylvia, as he said, could never think of herself apart from her family; and she did not think it of the least consequence that our ideas might be quite different from hers. She would gently but firmly get her own ideas into us. She had begun with Mamma and had, I thought, already made more progress than Perkin would approve.

"Sylvia," I inquired irrelevantly, "who is the Bishop of Lowminster?"

"Oh!" she sighed carelessly, "his name is Garboyle—Dr. Garboyle. He writes a good deal, against the Pope and so on, or he used to. I'm not sure whether his books were written before he became a bishop or since. Lowminster is in the next county, as of course you know; but he doesn't live there. The palace is small and poky, I fancy, and he only goes there for ordinations and those things; the real palace is nine miles out of Lowminster—Rood Abbey it is called. In the Roman Catholic times, I believe, the canons of Lowminster were all monks, and the Abbot's country house was out at Holy Rood; now the bishop lives there. It is a very fine place."

"Will he be at Lord Severn's?"

"I don't know, I'm sure—I should think not. Do you want to meet him?"

"Not at all. But he was at Caerleon, and Mamma mentioned him."

"Yes, very likely. He was extremely civil to us, and, as he did not shoot or hunt, of course, he naturally was more with us than the other gentlemen."

"And Mrs. Gumboil, was she civil too?"

"It isn't Gumboil—Garboyle. Pray don't let yourself fall into a habit of getting names wrong; nothing is more fatal."

"Well, Garboyle; I should think Gargoyle more suitable for a clergyman——"

"A clergyman! You don't meet many *clergymen* staying at houses like the Duke's. He's a bishop; and the last Bishop of Lowminster became Archbishop of York, and another moved on to Canterbury."

Of course, I knew Sylvia was dodging me, but I was persistent.

"You won't say whether his wife was nice," I observed. "I expect she was a pig."

"She may have been," Sylvia admitted handsomely. "Anyway it doesn't matter to us, for she's dead."

I thought her being dead did matter to us, but I held my peace.

"About your dresses," Sylvia went on. "Do let us be practical. Your dresses are the point, not poor Mrs. Garboyle—she was an honourable somebody or nobody, daughter of some obscure lord—a law-lord, I think; not of any importance. Green suits you (it ruins me). So does one particular white—a maize so pale as to be almost white at night. You must have three new ones, and your last will renovate—we can have Bridget Clancy in, and direct her. The Irish have more taste than English women. They are more like the French."

Bridget Clancy came from Llanthamy (not the Castle, but the town), but Sylvia did not mind—a dressmaker is not seen, and one does not mention her to one's friends. I had, indeed, once heard Sylvia mention her, but not by name, merely as "our sewing-maid." The Baroness had insinuated that a dress my sister was wearing must have been made by herself, it showed such taste and skill.

"No, indeed," Sylvia had said, "I wish I *could* make my own clothes. I am a fool at anything of the kind. It was made by our sewing-maid."

Under my sister's guidance, Bridget made me three new dresses, and made one, not absolutely new one, look as if it was new. I confess they were pretty, and Sylvia praised my appearance in them.

"It is so fortunate," she said, "that we are not in the least alike; our colouring so different, our height, and figure, and everything. No one will compare us. You set up for yourself on independent lines."

"Madge is quite as pretty now as most of the girls we saw at Caerleon," Mamma declared.

"Certainly. And her eyes are uncommon. So is her mouth—don't *be* impertinent, Marjory; but that look, while you hold your tongue, as if you were *going* to say something impertinent, is characteristic; and it goes with your nose. People will notice it. And so long as you *aren't* impertinent it keeps people in order to think you *could* be—only don't go beyond the look; you'd lose by it. *That* annoys people, and besides, they don't mind when you've said your worst. Keep a reserve."

I was quite cowed by all this new sort of advice and wisdom.

"And 'manner'?" I observed gruffly. "You used to entreat me to cultivate it."

Sylvia laughed, quite pleasantly. "So I did. I was young then" (she was not twenty yet). "I might as well have told a sandhill to cultivate pineapples. You never had 'manner,' and you never will. But it isn't necessary; so long as you have such a total want of it. It almost looks like a manner of your own. That is another good thing; it makes us more different. No one will compare us. I'm like a looking-glass, and reflect everything I look at—only I know where to look, and you wouldn't."

CHAPTER XXVII

I SAID long ago that I had given up expecting to know beforehand what Sylvia would do; but it is hard to give up trying to do what one knows is impossible, and before going to Severn Court I felt almost sure she would drill me, and warn me, and try to nudge me into line and position. How hard it is for those in his own country to know a prophet! Sylvia was a thousand times cleverer than I thought—really believing that half her cleverness was mere obstinacy and self-will. Especially I had imagined she would hold out as a model the elder Miss Auberon. She did no such thing. Nothing was evidently further from her ideas than that I should figure as her twin—moon to her sun. One reason why she now seemed less managing than she used to be was that she had a serener confidence in her own powers of management; and this made her leave little things more alone. She set causes to work, and had a placid trust in their producing legitimate effects.

I have always liked travelling, not only seeing places, but the process of getting to them, and I never could understand people who talk of being tired by a journey. I like being in the train, and it was a long time since I had gone anywhere by train when Sylvia and I went to Severn Court. Of course Mamma saw us off, and insisted we had forgotten half the things we ought to have with us; and when we proved we had not, she was nervously confident we should lose them at Dulchurch, where we had to change.

" Mamma dear, I never do forget or lose anything," said Sylvia, mildly. " Lady Monksbridge will come for you to-morrow to take you over there to luncheon. I think she would like you to ask her to luncheon in return, and those pheasants would do so well. Ask her for Thursday."

At last we were off (Mamma had got us to the station twenty minutes too soon), and she looked rather desolate alone on the platform, waving to the last moment; I saw her give a little jump in the middle of her waving, and knew she had suddenly remembered something else she was sure we had forgotten. With all her confidence in Sylvia she had a still older confidence in the malignant tendency of luggage to get itself left behind.

" Poor Mamma—how lonely she looks," I said, drawing in my head, as we plunged into the tunnel, and feeling guilty for having left her, though it was none of my doing.

" She won't be in the least lonely. Lady Monksbridge is going to look after her; they get on so well together," my sister replied calmly, settling herself comfortably into her corner. " It is so fortunate that we got the carriage to ourselves. You can have a corner by the window with your face to the engine."

The station for Severn Court is called Little Tony, which sounded, I thought, like a pet-name for somebody, but was only to distinguish it from Earl's Tony, and Tony Royal. There was no village to speak of, and we were the only people who got out of the train there, but there were two porters and a station-master, and they all leapt from their scabbards, so to speak, in their polite eagerness to make much of us. Every first-class passenger alighting at Little Tony was sure to be bound for Severn Court, and in our case there was no doubt at all, for a brougham from thence awaited us, and a footman belonging to it presented himself promptly at the door of our carriage to take our rugs and pretend to take all our smaller luggage —which really fell to the porters and the station-master.

They all, evidently, regarded me as a sort of lady-in-waiting to Sylvia (we were fortunately so different); but then, when the potentate is really great, the lady-in-waiting shines (mildly) in her splendour. I was taller than Sylvia, and looked now, if anything, older; but at nineteen I was merely a girl, and she was a personage.

She tipped the station-master and the two porters, and explained to me, in the brougham afterwards, that it was better to do it on arriving rather than on going away. "Of course," she said, "the coachman and footman notice it, and it gives them a good idea of you. By the time you go away it doesn't matter."

We drove through the little village, and across a goose-green, and I observed that all the cottages had stone slabs on them with a big "S" and a Marquess's coronet over it. Then by a church, with one round eye in the tower like a wink, and past the Vicarage (Lord Severn was lay-rector of all the parishes round, and had the great tithes), at the gate of which a clerical-looking lady was talking to a crooked old man with a sack round his shoulders. And so out into unmitigated country where there was nothing but wind and trees, and cold fields with a rising fog in them. The trees were nearly bare, and yet the darkening air seemed full of whirling leaves. It appeared to be a flattish, oozy country, and the road seemed too big for it; one could not imagine a town anywhere near, and we only met one little group of travellers—a pert, cheerful-looking gipsy man, with a rabbit in his mouth as if he were a sort of retriever, and his wife with a brown baby on her back.

Presently there was a park on one side of us, and then we came to a lodge like a Greek temple with another temple opposite, and a colonnade between. I supposed that to go to bed the lodge-keeper's family had to go from one temple to the other, and thought that a passage on the top of the colonnade might have been a convenience in rainy weather. We drove under the colonnade and skirted a twisting lake, where seven swans looked as if they were catching cold, and two others were standing on their heads to warm their feet. To our right there was a low mound with a triumphal arch on the top, and no road passing through it.

Then the road dipped a little, and then it turned gratuitously up-hill a little, just to prove, I thought, that the county was not as flat as a pancake. But you could see it was a real park, hundreds of years old; the trees were ancient and many of them huge, others had lost half their branches in some wintry gale, and were propped up with timber supports. After three miles of it we came to another lodge, Gothic this time, with a sort of moat curving away on each side of it; it didn't look a bit like Lord Monksbridge's Gothic lodge, and was in fact all that was left of a castle battered down by General Ludlow. Beyond it we skirted a long high wall, and some kennels with a wolfish noise inside, and then out into the open again; it was dusk now, and out of a huge expanse of flat gardens rose an immense square palace with rows and rows of lighted windows, which looked like an outrageous stone box. Nothing of its fine façade showed in the half-darkness, only its dark overbearing massive squareness, perforated with ugly slits of light. Had we arrived ten minutes later all those tall glaring slits would have been quenched, the windows shuttered and curtained, and there would have been but one huge, black bulk, with a watery moonlight behind it.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE first sight of his house convinced me that Lord Severn must be a stony person, of unsociable dimensions, of caryatid build, with a female caryatid for Marchioness, wearing a granite slab for cap—since she was not likely to appear in a coronet, no coronation being impending. As usual, I was wrong. Lord Severn looked like the miniature model for a nobleman to be executed, with the purchaser's improvements, on a larger scale; but highly finished all the same. His hands and feet were tiny, and seemed to have been designed with perfect skill and great care. All the usual features were there, and exactly proportioned. He was not fat, nor thin; neither smart nor shabby; to be handsome and so small would have been out of place, but he was neither plain nor handsome. What struck you at once was that he was an excellent man, and shrewd without being sharp, honest and ready to assume the honesty of everybody not yet proven a knave; clever, too, without setting any great store by cleverness, as if he had found it apt to keep queer company. I never saw any one simpler in manner, but you felt at once that this little man was a big man, and had always known it too well to be under the least necessity of calling heaven or earth to witness the fact.

His welcome was perfect. You knew he wouldn't have anybody in his house who had no business there; and from the moment you received his greeting you had no *arrière-pensée* of uneasiness as to your being in the right place. He was friendly and kind, but never gushing or effusive; the fact that you were his guest made you his equal for all that mattered; and yet it was not that he pretended a surface ignoring of facts; he was an enormously rich man, and he knew it, and knew that it laid great duties on him; knowing also that some of his guests were anything but rich: he thought much of birth, and counted it also a responsibility, but remembered well that ancient descent was not always titled: he knew, too, that he was of high rank, and for that reason he felt an obligation of high conduct over and above the common duty of all Christians. Of religion I never heard him talk but once, and then as if it were an indispensable department of State; all the same he was a sincerely religious man, honest, charitable, of irreproachable life and clean mind. No one was more fully aware than he that with this life all his wealth and rank would be taken from him, but he thought it as much his duty to preserve and value his high station and vast possessions in the meantime as it was to preserve and value health and life.

Lady Severn was not like him in any outward feature, being stately and beautiful, but in character they were well matched, and no one could see them together without being certain that they had married for love, and that twenty years of life together had only made them more truly one in love and respect. Her manner was a little graver than his, but equally cordial, and she had the same way of seeming to take it for granted that your being a guest in her house was a proof that you were fit to be there.

"This," she said, introducing her son, "is Bridgenorth. And here," she added, with a little smile, to Sylvia, "is some one who has been waiting for you."

Of course, it was Mr. Monk; he and Lord Bridgenorth were standing together, and they made a good contrast. They were both very good looking—Hampden Monk tall, dark, thin and rather icy; the boy (he was not nineteen) tall too, but brilliantly fair, with shining grey-blue eyes, and a lively, easy manner that made one think both of Perkin and Hubert.

Sylvia and Mr. Monk met as if they had each heard something quite to the other's advantage, and made a note of it: as if they held similar views on, say, the Moabite Stone, or the identity of the Man in the Iron Mask; and as if, should a suitable opportunity arise, they would be glad to resume the discussion of those interesting subjects, but were in no hurry to force the opportunity. Still it was evident that Mr. Monk, as he looked at her, was assuring himself that he had made no mistake about Sylvia's beauty, and yet it was with as distant and impersonal an admiration as he might have shown, had he recently purchased Mont Blanc and met it in the best society.

There were many other guests, but only two of them concern us at present.

Our host and hostess had welcomed us in a huge room called the White Saloon; and at the moment they, their son, and Mr. Monk were its only occupants besides ourselves. But a few minutes later two gentlemen walked in from another room opening from it by a wide arch, if you can call that an arch which has a flat top, supported on malachite pillars.

"We have finished our letters!" said one of the gentlemen, ambling up to Lady Severn with a smile that was not meant to suggest amusement, but merely to impress a universal peace and goodwill, inclusive of all her Majesty's subjects except Roman Catholics. He was between fifty and sixty, a full head taller than the Marquess, and broad in proportion, though not fat. His features were as neat as his dress, and his hands were as clean as his cuffs, and there was a good deal of both. He had a good leg—two in fact: and their fair proportions stood confessed in gaiters: he was in short a bishop, and I instantly concluded (rightly for once) that he was the Bishop of Lowminster. He seemed glad to see Sylvia, and not quite so glad to see me as her companion.

"Oh!" he said, in response to a congratulation on having finished his letters. "Mr. Auld-Baillie helped me. He has been quite a private secretary."

And his lordship beamed on Mr. Auld-Baillie, and rubbed his hands, and smiled around. He was really a good-natured man, and he liked people in general. All the same, I saw that he would have liked me better had I been somebody else: so I didn't like *him,* and found his teeth too white, and a little too large and numerous, and saw nothing to admire in his bulging calves.

Mr. Auld-Baillie was a young man; he had been a young man at eighteen, and he was a young man still at eight and thirty: tallish, well-built and well-looking: prosperous-looking too, and with every right to appear so. He had six or seven thousand a year, and no incumbrances (not even a wife), a good estate, and tenants who all paid their rents, and no jointures to pay himself, or younger brothers and sisters to provide for.

He had been a Member of Parliament for a dozen years, and had usually contrived to speak (at some length, though not to a very full house) at least once in each of those years, and always on the same subject, and more or less in the same terms. For rich, healthy, respected and prosperous as he was, there was one drop of bitterness in his cup, and that one drop was—Convents. He could not possibly forget or forgive them. The only ladies he had hitherto thought much of were nuns (though in one sense he thought very little of them). He hated them, in all Evangelical charity, and longed to befriend them—by abolishing them root and branch, and, in the interim, by inspecting them. Factories had inspectors, and convents must have them; if the people in factories liked having inspectors, and the nuns didn't want them, it only showed how much worse nuns were than factory-girls. It was on that theme he spoke in the House of Commons, and on no other; taxes and reforms were all leather and prunella, the only reform worthy of consideration was that of laying open the privacy of nuns to Government Inspectors. A gruff and burly Catholic Bishop had offered to give him leave to inspect at any moment, without warning, any convent in his vast diocese; but that would not satisfy Mr. Auld-Baillie at all. He did not want an inspector admitted *de bon grè,* but inspectors who should force themselves in *de mal grè.* He dreamed of nuns, not indiscreetly, but simply of the whippings and starvings they were receiving at the hands of Abbesses. He thought of them while shaving, and as he laid his respectable head on the pillows of those ducal, baronial and Marquessial houses he frequented, always decorously, never with any other desire than that of having them inspected and shown up.

To the Bishop of Lowminster he was almost a son; and the bishop would not have objected to his being a son-in-law (for the late Mrs. Garboyle had left one monument of their love); but the monument did not interest Mr. Auld-Baillie; she was not a nun, and her hair was red, as was her nose. Could Miss Garboyle have been all the nuns in England he might have married her as a duty, fraught with grim pleasure. As it was he didn't think her quite his social equal; and marrying her would not have made the slightest difference to any convent anywhere. I was not a nun either, but he did not look at me with the sort of disappointment that his lordship betrayed at my not being another member of my family.

" I never," said Sylvia, while we were dressing for dinner, " saw him take so much to any girl. I wish you were an escaped abbess."

Then she explained about Mr. Auld-Baillie's fondness for nuns, " a fondness, that is to say," like Tom Tulliver's for animals, " for throwing stones at them."

" What harm do they do? " I asked, not much admiring Mr. Auld-Baillie's hobby.

" None in particular. They are old maids provided for. I suppose if somebody married them all, there wouldn't be any."

It didn't seem as if she took any special interest in Mr. Auld-Baillie, and just then I made a remark that turned her attention to something else.

She had finished dressing, and was stooping over the fire warming her pretty feet, first one, then the other; and, as she leant forward, her locket hung loose, and I could see the back of it. The only jewellery she wore was this locket and three rings, three plain half-hoops of large diamonds, sapphires, and rubies, one of which was her engagement ring. All three, and the locket, were presents from Mr. Monk; the locket was rather large and very handsome; in front there was one very big sapphire, flat and oblong, surrounded by fine diamonds; on the back was a place for hair or a miniature-portrait, but under the glass there was no hair or portrait to be seen, only a little piece of blue silk.

"Sylvia," I said abruptly, "there's nothing in your locket; only a reserved seat."

She put up her hand, and laughed.

"Oh! I forgot to put it in," she said, calmly. "He gave me a lock of his hair for it. It was in a little bit of tissue paper. Oh! now I remember—I was reading 'Phineas Finn' (the people in it are, many of them, like those one meets in these sort of places, or else I don't see much in it) and I shut it up in the book to keep the place; after he had gone, of course, I finished the chapter. And there it is, at home; Mamma was right, you see, though really I hardly ever forget anything. It was stupid of me."

She paused, and looked about her thoughtfully.

"Will he find out?" I asked. "Will he look at it?"

"Yes, he'll look at it. But, certainly, he would never dream of touching it. Still, it is stupid. Your hair is quite a different colour, so is mine."

Then she looked down, and her eyes fell on the rug on which she was standing. It was of fur, some long, dark fur, nearly black.

"Ah!" she said, "how lucky!"

And she went to the dressing-table, brought back a little pair of scissors, stooped down, and cut from the rug a lock of its hair.

"You embroider? where are your silks?" she then demanded, and I pointed to the box in which they were. She went over to it, to choose a pale blue, from which she cut a short thread with which she tied up her lock of hair—some sort of bear's, I think. This she trimmed, and taking off the locket, opened it at the back, and put the hair in, then closed it again, and surveyed it with mild satisfaction.

"It is just the colour," she observed. "If it should hang loose again, or get turned the wrong way—one should always count on accidents—it would be all right, even if he were looking. Come, there's the bell."

All this time I had watched her silently; my sister stupefied me, and no remark of mine could have done justice to my feelings.

CHAPTER XXIX

At dinner I sat between Mr. Auld-Baillie, who took me in, and Lord Bridgenorth, who had fallen to the lot of Lady Hermione Cressy, whose mamma, the Countess of Agincourt, loomed large and crapey over against us, but a little to our left. The late Lord Agincourt had gone, not very recently, to that bourne whence Earls do not return, and Lady Hermione was a co-heiress. There was also a Lady Philippa, and the House of Lords had not yet made up its mind whether one should be Baroness Cinque Ports and the other Baroness Nonsuch, or whether neither should be a Baroness at present.

Lady Hermione was pretty and pleasant, and she made friends with me across Lord Bridgenorth, who seemed disposed to share his good-nature between us. Sometimes Mr. Auld-Baillie looked as if he thought these passages on my right were uncalled for, and felt them an interruption. His remarks were apt to degenerate into speeches, and sounded as if he knew them by heart; they had a regular line of argument, and it bothered him to have the thread of it broken.

"We're so sorry for you," said Lady Hermione (in a voice stifled partly by tact and partly by a mouthful of *vol-au-vent*) across Lord Bridgenorth—a Miss Beaufront, on the other side of Mr. Auld-Baillie, had momentarily distracted his attention by an ill-timed appeal for salt. "We're so sorry for you. You might as well be in the House of Commons. Isn't it awful, Briggy?"

Lady Hermione, who looked hardly seventeen, and Lord Bridgenorth were cousins, and called each other Briggy and Glorum.

"Try and shunt him on to his other neighbour," Lord Bridgenorth advised me, with real feeling. "She rather likes it; and she can cope with him better."

It struck me that Mr. Auld-Baillie was aware of it, and preferred me as a listener. Miss Beaufront would seize a pretended clue and run off with it in a speech of her own. She had a precipitous way of talking, and would climb up words and tumble down over them, and be up again, as if they were jumps in a steeplechase; and some of the words she used were not those she wanted, and only remotely resembled them even in sound, but she let them come tumbling out of her mouth, and never stopped to pick them up again.

"Ah! Marriage!" I heard her say, rushing off with her cue. "Yes, the proper goal of woman; but marriage itself is often a rockery—and there aren't prizes enough to go round. People have different vacations—some women may be *called* to be old maids——"

"Oh, quite so," Mr. Auld-Baillie agreed, very handsomely.

"And some men may be called to be old bacchusses. No one interferes with them. I don't see what's the harm of being a nun if you don't mind it."

"The harm is——" Mr. Auld-Baillie was beginning, but Miss Beaufront snapped the argument out of his mouth and made off with it.

"I quite follow you" ("follow" indeed!) "and agree up to a point. The danger would be of a universal intimation; but *is* there any fear of it? One never imitates what one really dislikes, and the life of nuns is not likely to be one of general seduction to the bulk of women. It's poky, I should say; and the sameness!—one shrinks from mahogany."

Mr. Auld-Baillie, I think, would have been glad to shrink a good way down the mahogany; but if he himself embodied a certain monotony, Miss Beaufront did not shrink from it.

"The Convent," he interrupted desperately, "is the parody of the Home, and Home is the true sphere of practical religion."

"There I'm with you—home is the place for religion," chipped in Miss Beaufront, who was never at home if she could help it. "And there's no doubt nuns push religion too far—that's why I don't think there's any fear of generous limitation." She knew quite well she meant "general imitation" and hadn't said it, but she didn't bother. "There should be a *juste milieu,* of course."

"A *via media,*" said Mr. Auld-Baillie, sarcastically, not intending to wither Miss Beaufront, but Dr. Newman, as if that too famous divine had advocated small religious pills, or weak homœopathic doses of sanctity.

"But," said Miss Beaufront, "the blood-colonel stories about convents are all nonsense."

"Ah! we can only hope so," said Mr. Auld-Baillie as if he did not intend to indulge in any such hope.

Meanwhile my other neighbours were making me quite at home, and I could hardly realize that I had never set foot in Severn Court till that evening. The great room was not in the least too large for the numerous company, nor the many servants too many for them. The table and the meal, the flowers and plate, the dresses—all seemed to belong to each other. It was all fine and grand together, and as simple and natural as our own little dinner at home was for us there. Every one was talking, no one talked too loud. Mr. Auld-Baillie might wish to lecture, if Miss Beaufront would let him, but even he had no idea of being loud and offensive.

I found Lord Bridgenorth as easy to be intimate with as Perkin, and Lady Hermione much easier than Sylvia, though Sylvia herself was pleasanter (when we met again in the drawing-room after dinner) than I had ever known her. Certainly no one there was so pretty. Sylvia's beauty could be called nothing but prettiness, but it was prettiness of a kind and degree that I never saw equalled. Lady Severn was still beautiful, and there was a Lady Adelaide de Bohun who was quite lovely; Sylvia was neither; but, though there were at least a dozen very pretty girls there, none of them could be thought of in comparison with her. Her colouring was as exquisite as that of the most perfect miniature, her little features were perfect, her nose and hair alone would have set her above any of the rest; so would her tiny, shell-pink ears, and her mouth—though it was too small, not for beauty, but to belong to any one one would wish to be loved by. Long afterwards I heard crowds of people in London raving about a certain Mrs. Appleby because of her nose only; how well I knew that nose, and how certain I was that Mrs. Appleby had no more heart in her than a rose-petal. If you ask what its form was I can only say that it might have been "Roman" and wasn't, that it had successfully avoided the risk of being *retroussé;* that it was faultlessly refined, and that its refinement had nothing on earth to do with the feelings, and very little to do with the mind, everything to do with taste, and habit, and a natural aversion from what was vulgar, without much inward aversion from what might be thought coarse enough by common folk.

But Mrs. Appleby was poisonously vain—with only a nose to go on; and Sylvia was no more vain than a peacock, who shows the public his fine feathers without thinking of the public at all, or imagining that they are of his own making.

Honestly I doubt if Sylvia knew how dazzlingly pretty she was; so far as she thought of her beauty at all, it was as a lucky asset in the Auberon family. She was singularly impersonal.

"It is," she observed to me, looking around her, from the corner in which she had found me, "*the* most fortunate thing we are so different. If we were alike—especially as we are so absurd as to be twins—there would be only one and a half of us. No one can compare us."

Of that I was fully aware, not that she meant it that way.

"And if they did?" I asked stupidly.

"They can't. What's the use of putting silly cases? People who admire me wouldn't look at you."

"I know *that,*" I put in savagely. And she lifted one pretty eyebrow with reasonable deprecation.

"And there are plenty of people who would prefer the younger Miss Auberon," she added calmly (she never denied the existence of mental obliquity in her fellow-creatures). "You are admired already. Mr. Auld-Baillie would require to be told that *I* was anything remarkable. No one ever knew him *épris* before —is it *épris* or *éprise* when the object is feminine? I know so little French. It is quite a triumph. You know quite well I shouldn't tell you if I cared whether you thought of him or not—I don't. There's no hurry; this is your first peep into the real world, and you're here just to enjoy yourself. Still it's a tribute, and people will think all the more of you—you see he never does pay attention to ladies, especially to girls of our age—and they will think more still when they see you don't care a bit whether he pays attention to you or lets it alone."

"Yes, I do care. I hope he'll let it alone."

CHAPTER XXX

It seemed to me that Mr. Auld-Baillie's "attentions" were purely imaginary; but Sylvia had no imagination, wherever she thought she saw something there was something to see; and within twenty-four hours I began to perceive she was right, and that Mr. Auld-Baillie was acquiring a tiresome habit of cropping up in my neighbourhood. Lady Hermione expressed it in a striking but disagreeable metaphor.

"You are," she assured me, in sympathetic confidence, "his carcase, and wherever you are there is he gathered together."

Sometimes the Bishop betrayed the same tendency, but it was not for my own sake.

"I hope," he said the first time, "that you left Mrs. Auberon well."

"Oh yes! Mamma always is well." (He looked needlessly glad to hear it.) "So is Sylvia." (He seemed less impressed.)

"It is I," I observed, "who catch things."

He looked as if he thought it an unpleasant habit, and Lady Hermione (who was eavesdropping) declared afterwards that it sounded like insects.

"You must," he observed, "have been very sorry to leave her."

"Yes, very."

"I'm sure you must have wished she were coming with you—a very natural wish."

He looked so much as if he shared it, that for the moment I thought things might be as well as they were.

"Oh, she has Perkin. He'll look after her."

"Perkin?"

"Yes, my brother Perkin."

Perkin was evidently a new idea to the Bishop, and I think he regarded him as superfluous, so I dwelt on him.

"He is at school, but only in the town, and he comes home every day. He will look after Mamma," I repeated, hoping that Miss Garboyle would do as much for her own parent.

"An excellent son, I'm sure," said his lordship.

"Oh yes! He is to be a bishop."

The one before me stared, and I added cheerfully—

"That is Sylvia's arrangement."

To do him justice the Bishop of Lowminster laughed.

"I see!" he said. "The ambition is all on your sister's side. One doesn't much like to hear of a *boy's* being too ambitious."

I was rather annoyed, for I didn't see why he should think it naughty ambition in Perkin to aim at the mark he had hit himself. Perkin, I was sure, was much cleverer.

"Oh," I remarked, "Perkin won't hear of being a bishop; he won't even be a clergyman."

I caught Lady Hermione's eye—that is to say, I saw she was squinting at me ferociously; but I really did not care if his lordship did think me unpleasant. It would be rather a good thing if he thought us on the whole a disagreeable family.

"Does your Mamma wish your brother to take

Orders?" the Bishop inquired gravely. "She would be a good judge of his fitness."

"Oh! Mamma would think him fit to be a Commander-in-Chief, or an Admiral," I replied with tactless rhetoric. "But it's nothing to do with Mamma. It is Sylvia who is disposer supreme in our family."

Lady Hermione's eyes came out of their squint with abrupt alarm, and the Bishop gave a sort of wriggle down his shiny black back, and seemed willing to leave me. To speed him I added—

"What Sylvia decides is what takes place in our family."

The Bishop did leave me, but I saw him turn a meditative eye on my sister (who was discussing drains with an elderly Viscount in the middle distance), as if there might be something in it.

"You're an abandoned young creature," Lady Hermione declared, closing in on me.

"And we thought you all meekness and innocence," said Lord Bridgenorth.

"That's not the way to talk to Bishops," said Lady Hermione.

"It all depends," I assured her, "what they're up to; and whether you want to make a good impression or not. *I* didn't."

"So I gathered. Is it to make him report unfavourably to Mr. Auld-Baillie?"

"Ask her," suggested "Briggy," "no questions, and she'll tell you no lies."

It was as Sylvia had said. When the other gentlemen were out shooting the Bishop was in the midst of us—and so was Mr. Auld-Baillie, who never shot, and never hunted, but carried on an eager correspondence with people who were arranging meetings for escaped nuns to speak at. He was much in request as chairman on such occasions, and lived in a chronic state of hope deferred and disappointment repeated, because the revelations of these ladies were not, as Miss Beaufront would put it, sufficiently "blood-colonel." I expressed to Lady Hermione, who informed me of these particulars, my satisfaction that he was not in the habit of quoting these ladies to me.

"Oh," she said, laughing, "he's the soul of propriety in private life. It's only on platforms that he likes listening to—to that sort of thing."

"What sort of thing?"

"Well, it's worse than any smoking-room. He'd never sit still in a smoking-room while the sons of Belial were telling stories a quarter as bad as those he laps up like milk at his meetings. I hadn't any idea what the meetings were like, and asked Mamma to take me to one for fun—last May, in London. I thought she'd have a fit. 'Hermione,' she said, and she always calls me 'Glorum,' unless I've done something bad, 'never make such a suggestion again, or let any one know you have made it now. They're simply indecent, Mr. Auld-Baillie's meetings are.' All the same, I told Briggy, and he got as red as a sunset. It seemed Mr. Auld-Baillie had asked *him* to come to one, and Uncle Severn was nearly as much horrified as Mamma."

"But," I said, "I thought he was so pious?"

"Oh yes! But he thinks it specially pious to listen to ghastly things that are supposed to have happened in convents——"

"To the ladies who tell them?"

"My dear, they're never ladies. I saw a picture of one of them outside Exeter Hall, on a placard—*the* most awful-looking female: 'Sister Emma, the Escaped Abbess.' Mamma nearly shook me for looking at it; she looked like a fat barmaid."

"How do you know?"

"I don't; she looked red, and fat, and drinky, and greedy, and brazen, and hypocritical, with goggly, nasty eyes, and a *horrible* mouth, and ten red carrots crossed on her lumpy chest. Mamma said she was never a nun at all, only a sort of servant the nuns had taken in out of green-ness, and had had to send off for making love to the milkman, a married man with seventeen children all under six——"

"Hermione!"

"Well, it came to that. Mamma puts things differently. She was *awful,* anyway, and bamboozled Auld-Baillie and twenty other gooses like him, and became a sore subject. So Sister Caroline-Jane or Augusta-Dumbella came into favour, though only an escaped Prioress, and *she* hadn't enough to tell, and they quarrelled over terms. But he goes on and on. I wouldn't say all this, only I see he bores you to frenzy."

Lady Hermione had an exaggerated way of talking. Mr. Auld-Baillie did not bore me to frenzy, but he bored me whenever he got the chance, and his indifference to outdoor occupations gave him too many chances. He and the Bishop were supposed to shut themselves up to write letters all morning, but they seemed to require little breaks during which one or other, or both, would refresh themselves with intervals of female society. Miss Beaufront rather enjoyed these incursions from the library, and was pretty evenly balanced between the two gentlemen, taste inclining her slightly to the M.P. and Squire, and opportunity throwing the Bishop more in her power, for Mr. Auld-Baillie had a certain dexterity in avoiding her. Still I was aware that his lordship, when he could, rather preferred talking to me about my mother than being talked to by Miss Beaufront about his daughter.

After luncheon these two gentlemen would always walk or drive with us, and I warmly agreed with Lady Hermione's dictum that all old women should wear petticoats as well as aprons, and not impose on the public in pepper-and-salt trousers or petticoats and black gaiters.

One evening, while we were dressing for dinner, Sylvia, after looking at me meditatively for a moment or two, said—

"I don't think you are going to care much for Mr. Auld-Baillie——"

"Certainly not," I interrupted with a little warmth.

"Oh, it's all right. There's no necessity. No doubt he is quite in earnest, and it would be a good match; but you've only just come to the sea, and there are better fish in it. I merely alluded to it as a matter of business."

"A matter of business!"

"Yes. I'm not going to try and make you fall in love with him; don't be anxious. But there's a matter of business. Do you remember a portrait we have, on panel, of Bishop Latimer?"

"The burnt man? Yes, I remember it, it's in the library."

"Yes. It seems that Mr. Auld-Baillie is some sort of descendant—collateral, I think—of that Bishop. And the portrait belonged to an aunt of his, who had no business to sell it, but she did—at least, it was sold among her other things, when she died, at Christies' or somewhere. And he went to bid for it, but Uncle Stapleton was there too, buying china and things; and, because Mr. Auld-Baillie wanted it, he bid him up, for Uncle Stapleton couldn't stand him; and Uncle Stapleton got the picture for seventeen hundred guineas. It's by some great artist; Holbein, Mr. Auld-Baillie thinks. He wants it still, and was asking me questions about it: you know everything at Cross Place is Mamma's to do what she likes with. She would let him have it if I told her to do so; and I am sure he would be delighted if I said he might have it for fifteen hundred pounds—that would be a good deal less than he bid for it. We none of us care a bit about the portrait, and fifteen hundred pounds would be a godsend to Mamma, especially just now. My marriage will cost a lot, and, of course, that must be *our* affair. Lady Monksbridge has begged me to let her give me cheques, for she knows all this going about costs some money—*you* know I do it first and foremost for Hampden's sake; that was one reason why I did not choose to allow the marriage to take place at once; we have not been engaged many weeks, and see how much it has done for him already! He would never have been *here,* nor at Caerleon, nor at the Closeboroughs', nor at the Duke of Tilbury's, if he had not been engaged to me. I have launched him already. And if I had married him at once it would have been quite different, quite; and there would only have been you for bridesmaid—now you will be one of eight, and the other seven—but we needn't talk of that now. As I was saying, it all costs money, this going about; so will the wedding and my trousseau; if Mamma had this fifteen hundred pounds it would be a godsend. I would ask her to let three hundred be my marriage portion, and give it me at once; I should pay for the wedding and my trousseau, and this going about, out of it. The other twelve she would invest (and it would add sixty pounds a year to her income); at her death she would leave it to you and Perkin. I shouldn't want any then, and, besides, I should have had my share at once. What do you think? Of course, I should not think of it, if you really meant anything about Mr. Auld-Baillie."

"*That* I don't. But what has that got to do with it?"

"Everything. If you were going to marry him I should not dream of having anything about money between us. It would be as bad as if I let Lady Monksbridge give me cheques. I saw you didn't mean to marry him—all the same, he will propose——"

"No, he won't," I declared vehemently. "I should hate him to."

"But he will; and it will be just as well. *I* could stop him, if it was me, but *you* can't, and it will do no harm at all. He won't break his heart, but he will be upset; he's as vain as a girl, in spite of his demureness, and very obstinate; it will do him great good, and us too. Of course, *we* shall not say he has proposed, nor will he; but every one will know, and it will show these people that the Auberons are not to be got for the mere asking. On the whole I'm *glad* you don't want him."

I never could listen to my sister, on such occasions as these, without staring at her; her mind moved on lines above mine, and I could only watch her calm progression in astonied silence, which suited her very well, as she desired neither comment nor applause; my comments would be jejune, and, for applause, her own well-padded conscience satisfied her. She looked at me again, with unimpassioned criticism.

"To think," she said, with all her singular candour, "that once I should have thought Mr. Rumble good enough for my sister! I must say it was very good of you not to mind——"

"I never had the least idea!"

"No? You never *could* see two inches before you, or half an inch before me. I knew he was well-off, and likely to get preferment slowly. (By the way, you needn't go on bothering yourself with that Sunday-school when we go back.) But that's all finished; poor little Monksbridge! We hardly belong *there* any more. . . . We're going to the Solways' next month, and you can have some new dresses (I'll give them you out of my three hundred). By that time you'll be the only girl who ever had the chance of being Mrs. Auld-Baillie of Auld Crankie Castle, and who has refused it! It is so fortunate we are so different! Without being in the least like me, you will have done as much, in a different way, for the Auberons as I have."

For a moment I thought she was going to kiss me, but she merely adjusted my sash, and the bell rang.

CHAPTER XXXI

When was Sylvia wrong? She was right, at all events, about Mr. Auld-Baillie proposing, though how on earth it came about I never could understand. If my own impressions were worth anything (which I am far from asserting) I should say it was over a sketch of his East Lodge—a sketch by his sister (now in heaven) who had passed through this world *en route,* apparently for no other purpose than to make sketches of Auld Crankie Castle, from the south, west and east—they utterly ignored the north, it being somewhat over-far in that direction as a mere matter of latitude. Also she had left sketches of Fenny Baillie (for my squire had a seat in Lincolnshire, too) with a good deal of sky in them, and a good deal of foreground, and a background that looked as if it rather wanted a leg-up. But the late Miss Elspeth Auld-Baillie's view of the East Lodge to Auld Crankie Castle was her *pièce de résistance;* it was so baronial that the views of the actual castle came, subsequently, almost as an anticlimax. An outside public that saw only that lodge could hardly fail of conceiving ideas of the castle vague and vast. It looked as if dowager countesses would have esteemed it a privilege to reside in it. It frowned and ogled, and bristled, and elbowed itself out in flanking turrets, and had machicolations (for the convenience of visitors who liked to have hot porridge poured down the nape of their necks) and gates that yawned so widely that I wanted to yawn too.

But those gates gave entrance to a road, and the road led to a Home (where religion has its legitimate operation), and what is a Home without a mistress? Thus it was that (as I imagine) Mr. Auld-Baillie arrived at his point. Anyway he arrived; and he was there before I had got beyond the lodge. Once there it was hard to get him out again. He was fond of his castle, and obstinately determined to make me fond of it too. It was not only a castle, but it had a history (I understood him to say that two Kings of Scotland had been murdered in it, but perhaps one of them was only born there), and its owners had always been fine rebellious people, who held their heads up and bothered their Sovereigns, so that they were much looked on. That was in Pre-Hanoverian times; during the eighteenth century they had been on the Government side, against the clans, and the exiled royal family. Mr. Auld-Baillie made love with a sort of pious worldliness, letting me see that Auld Crankie (in Scotland he was not called Mr. Auld-Baillie) was able to make his wife somebody of importance; he did not say that I should be the first untitled mistress the castle had owned for generations, but he mentioned his mother, Lady Grissel, and his grandmother, Lady Jean, and incidentally alluded to the feud between his family and that of the Duke of Staffa—only partially healed by his great-grandfather's marriage with His Grace's eleventh daughter, Lady Alison; and it appeared that his great-great-grandfather's wife had been that Lady Christian Auld-Baillie who kissed every man on the Auld Crankie lands willing to take arms against Charles Edward in '45. In fact, he dwelt so long and lovingly on birth and family that I was convinced Sylvia had made a mistake, and inwardly thanked Heaven I had not refused him before he asked me. But with a pious jump he suddenly turned from these high names, and made it plain that he wished to alter mine; that domestic, simple happiness was his object, and that together we were to attain it in the practice of solid religion in a not unworthy Home—to wit, Auld Crankie Castle.

Sylvia was *not* mistaken, nor was she wrong about his being upset. He reddened at the first word of refusal, and almost argued; he *was* obstinate, and unwilling to be convinced that his serious offer was not to be accepted. He waved the East Lodge rhetorically in his gentlemanly hand, as if it had been the notes of a speech, and we were in the House of Commons. He spoke of the essentials of a happy marriage, and mentioned duty in connection with them, clearly implying that mine was to be Mrs. Auld-Baillie of Auld Crankie Castle.

"Perhaps," he admitted, "I have spoken too soon——"

"Yes," said I, with all my habitual grace and tact. "Yes. *Any* time would be too soon——"

And if he got redder, so did I.

"I have not known you long," he conceded (but stiffly), "and perhaps I should have waited. Still, we have been much together—and I confess I have discerned till now, no repugnance."

"Repugnance! No. But I don't want to marry anybody."

"Then there is no one else; no counter——" He was going to say "attraction," but changed his word and said "no prior attachment?"

"Of course not," I declared, and it seemed to mollify him, though I only meant that I had never thought in the least about getting married. It mollified him too much, and he brisked up.

"At home I only used to see Perkin's schoolfellows," I explained.

"Oh, and Eustace de Braose, and perhaps Lord Chevronel; and there was nothing of *that* sort—naturally?"

He smiled. "Well, well," said he (like Mr. Pickwick, more cheerfully). "You are very young. It is a new idea to you. *I* can't regret it. New ideas are often unpleasant at first——"

"Very," I agreed, too heartily.

"Well, well" (less cheerfully), "but as they become more familiar they become more agreeable."

I shook my head, and the gesture certainly implied that *he* would not become more agreeable by increased familiarity. He flushed again, and slightly elevated the East Lodge, as though to deprecate interruption.

"I must give you time," he went on. "You must forget my suddenness (I did not *think* it too sudden—nor did the Bishop), but we were wrong. My friend the Bishop, in his zeal for a suitable Christian marriage, perhaps encouraged me too warmly; he perceived my preference at an early date and showed his strong approval—he thinks highly of your family."

"Of me, or of Sylvia?—he hasn't seen Perkin."

"No; but he knows your mother; and I am sure from his report that I can rely upon her strong sense of fitness and duty. Let us forget that I have spoken, if I have spoken too soon."

"Oh yes. Pray do forget it. That will be quite the best thing," said I, eagerly. But Mr. Auld-Baillie was not so pleased as he should have been.

"*I*," he observed, "cannot forget it; nor wish to."

"Oh, please try. It's so easy to forget things even when one doesn't try."

"My dear Miss Auberon, you are very young. These things are not of a nature to be forgotten. I merely meant let us go on as if I had not yet spoken—not yet. And in the meantime you will see your excellent mother; her opinion (her mature judgment) may, *must*, have weight, with so dutiful a daughter. The Bishop says nothing can bear a higher testimony to the excellence of the mother than the affectionate devotion of her daughters."

"Oh, but he doesn't know anything about us at all. Of course, Mamma is a perfect darling, but she's not like that a bit. She never talks to us (to Perkin and me) about our duty and all that—she only says we had much better do what Sylvia says. We're not dutiful daughters—we are devoted to her—Sylvia is wonderfully nice to her—but she just does what Sylvia says, and lets me do what I like so long as Sylvia doesn't mind."

I could see that Mr. Auld-Baillie was not inattentive, he was (as Perkin would have said) sucking it all in, and I think he began to discern a new line of tactics. He hadn't hitherto quite realized Sylvia. In fact, Lady Hermione gave me to understand, he had once slightly snubbed my sister. He became less red and more thoughtful, and he softly patted the East

Lodge against the lower portion of his waistcoat with reviving complacence. Unfortunately my frankness had put a potent weapon in his hands, and had, as I presently found, converted an all-powerful ally into a determined foe. But for the moment I could only feel it a relief that he passed from more personal and heated discussions to calm eulogy of the Bishop and Rood Palace.

"It is pleasant to think," he said, "that what was once a stronghold of monachism is now an Evangelical Home; where once an Abbot ruled, there lives a Christian pastor with the keenest relish for domestic joys."

For my part I should not have minded if the Abbot had been there still.

CHAPTER XXXII

"Of course," Sylvia had said, "*we* shall tell no one," and *I* did not even tell *her*. But she found out, and she could not have found out unless some one had known; she was right again—every one knew, and I think Miss Beaufront was the universal informant, and that the Bishop had let on to her. He was a bit of a gossip, and it did not displease him that people should be aware that the Auberon family in general were receiving unexceptionable offers. To me Miss Beaufront was a little tart, but approving all the same. It was, she evidently thought, silly of Mr. Auld-Baillie to propose to me, but very sensible of me to refuse him; and all her tartness was mingled with an increased respect. Poor Mr. Auld-Baillie was the only person at Severn Court who had not the least idea that every one knew what had happened. No one, except Lady Hermione, said anything to me, but even Mr. Monk treated me with a certain added consideration; Lord and Lady Severn, who never suspected they were showing it, did show that they thought more of the Auberons because the most insignificant of them had not snapped at a rich and highly respectable suitor. So, it appeared, did Lady Agincourt.

"Mamma," Lady Hermione confided to me, "saw it all from the first; and she wondered how it would be. Of course, your sister has you under her thumb—she's too clever for *us* poor creatures."

"Sylvia," I declared angrily, "'saw it all,' as you call it, though I didn't believe her—and she didn't want it in the least. If you and I are to quarrel, there's your subject. It makes me mad to hear the way you talk about her."

"Who? I never said black or white about her before."

"You're all the same! You talk about her being clever, and she *is* much cleverer than any of you——"

"Don't I say so?"

"Yes; and you mean to be nasty. You're just like old Mrs. de Braose—she seems to bow down before Sylvia, and calls her clever just in your way."

"Well, she's a clever old villain herself. If *she* says so—— My dear Marjory, do keep your temper. We can quarrel if you like, but what's the good? Sylvia is ten times prettier than you, or any of us; and a hundred times wiser (in her generation) than you. But it isn't *your* generation; and you can thank God for it. She is a great lady, and Mr. Monk will get the good of it; but you don't want to be a great lady, and she wants to make you one. God made you a lady, and if she spoils you I shall hate her, and be cross with you. 'Fax is fax,' as a nursemaid of ours used to say, and you needn't bite me if I drag them out and laugh at them. She'll be the new Lady Monksbridge—and the first, to all intents and purposes; and we shall all succumb to her. But we can't spare you to her; we just want Marjory Auberon—to like her and keep her. And I only wish I knew Perkin. Do you think I don't understand you all by now? When you talk to me and Briggy about Perkin and your mother and Cross Place and Hubert Byrne, don't you suppose we see them all much better than in a picture? I just wish I knew Perkin. I'm on his side, so's Briggy, and we'd encourage him: he needs it, poor boy! He's the nicest of you all—oh, don't interrupt. I met your mother at Caerleon, and she is charming—but Sylvia intends to make her share the Lowminster throne and mitre, and she'll do exactly what Sylvia chooses. What's the use of looking savage? You know it's true. If Perkin could go about with your mother and you, *he* might look after you both, but *you* alone couldn't look after your mother (you're too weak); and besides, Miss Sylvia will only take one of you with her at a time, and when it's your mother's turn you'll be left safe at home. Now I've had my say, and I feel better. I've been smouldering for five days, and getting more and more anxious. Now that old maid in breeches has proposed, and you've said you'd rather not, I breathe freely."

"I don't care how you breathe," I said fiercely. "And I think you're a horrid girl. What sort of girl must you think *me*, to think I'll stand still and let you talk like that of my sister? And, as it happens, you have been quite wrong—Sylvia didn't *want* me to accept him."

"That," said Hermione, quite unmoved by my angry recriminations, "is the odd part of it. I wonder——"

"What do you wonder?" I demanded hotly.

"I wonder if she knows that he will be an Earl? She seems to know almost everything, but *that* may have escaped her. His grandfather married Lady Jean Macleod, the Duke of Iona's only daughter; she had only one brother, and *he* had only one son. The present Duke has no children at all. He's about ninety, and very shaky. When he dies there'll be an end of the Dukedom, but Mr. Auld-Baillie will be Earl of Inverchlory. On the whole, I am pretty sure she *didn't* know it."

And, alas! I felt pretty sure of it too—and my face betrayed it. But I was thankful she *hadn't* known it, though my spirit misgave me when I considered how certain she was to find out.

"Briggy, come here," Lady Hermione called out, as that youth peeped into the little yellow morning room (not more than forty feet square) where this troubled colloquy had taken place. "Marjory is trying to slay me, and I'd as lief have you to defend me as any one."

"She's been misbehaving?" the boy said, glancing at her and me with a kind little smile of deprecation. I neither smiled nor spoke, and he looked more troubled. "She does like you so," he said to me, with such an earnest simplicity that I could only think what a nice lad it was. His shining blue eyes travelled to and fro between her half-wilful face and my resentful one with an expression more wistful than puzzled. "Glorum," he said, "you often say you'd like to have been a boy—boys don't quarrel."

"I didn't want to quarrel—I haven't quarrelled now."

"No, but you've been saying things. Miss Auberon——"

"Call her Marjory!" said Hermione. "You always do behind her back. At least, we call you 'Muggles'—we've picked up all Perkin's expressions." And Hermione turned so queer and kind a face to me, that

I knew Briggy would think me sulky if I resisted it, and somehow I felt sure he would always be right.

I grinned, and felt (Lord knows why) lumpy about the throat.

"We're all for Perkin," said Briggy. How diplomatic is plain simplicity!

"I told her so, that's what she flew out about."

But Briggy knew better. "You'll never be a boy, Glorum," he said, shaking his head; and I'm sure he knew as well as if he'd heard it all what I had flown out about. "But, Marjory, she's a good chum, and we wanted you to be one of us three. Do let us."

His English was not lucid, but *he* was; and I liked them both better than anybody I knew, except Perkin. They were not unlike Perkin in some ways. As what comes into my mind, generally comes out, I said—with a gesture intended to express oblivion of the past, but rather like that of a laconic diner waving away an *entrée* he doesn't want—

"I wish Perkin was here! At least, I don't, because he wouldn't like it at all."

"That's civil!" said Briggy.

"I'm all for Perkin," said Hermione, with too much meaning.

"You mean——" I began, with some return of warmth.

"I mean just what you say—that he would not like it a bit. He has too much sense."

"Oh," said I, "if you think *I* wanted to come, you're just mistaken; it was——"

"Not Sylvia, of course," observed Hermione, coolly.

"Glorum! You're the most hopeless person to set up for being a boy," our peacemaker interrupted;

like all efficient peacemakers, he thoroughly understood his own weapons.

She gave a little disconcerted kick, and held her tongue.

"No," I hurried on, "I didn't want to come; but I don't mind it now I'm here—except for——"

"Mr. Auld-Baillie," suggested Hermione; and to all intents and purposes, I nodded, though I didn't wag my head at all.

"Now that's over——" I went on, but she chipped in again.

"Over! Just begun, you mean. However, *you've* begun well. Otherwise, I should say, you would have been better at home."

"Glorum!"

"Well, she would. It's no use Gloruming. I don't see the good of repenting till you've done all you want, and I want to set clearly before her the evils of going a duke-ing (dear Perkin!) that she may not fall alive into the pits that some (No! no! don't leap up; I never said 'Sylvia') have diggèd for her."

I did leap, and Briggy leapt too; I left her to his just reproaches and fled (through the hall, where I saw Sylvia, without Mr. Monk, and *with* Mr. Auld-Baillie) upstairs to our own bedroom. And all the time I heard Perkin declaring, traitorously, that Hermione was right.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Two important telegrams reached Severn Court that very afternoon. One brought word that a duke was dead, and one that a lord was very ill. The Duke was Mr. Auld-Baillie's cousin; the Lord was Mr. Monk's father. The telegrams arrived together just before tea-time, and all Severn Court knew of them at once. Both noblemen had had a "stroke"; but Miss Beaufront, who knew all about Dukes, assured the Bishop that it was his grace's fifth, and seemed almost surprised it had killed him—the four others having failed.

"He was, I believe, a very worthy man," said the Bishop, patting his apron with a dolorous complacence. He had always liked Mr. Auld-Baillie, and it is well to have Evangelical Earls. "He has been taken in the fulness of time."

He bent and stroked his calves, which had a certain fulness too.

"Oh yes," said Miss Beaufront. "As to Lord Thingummy, I don't know. It may be his first. Not an old man, I fancy."

The Bishop shook his head, with a less complacent dolour.

"About fifty-five, I hear," he said. He was not turned fifty-six himself.

"Dear me! Quite in the prime of life," said Miss Beaufront; "he may live to have a dozen."

"A dozen?" queried the Bishop, thinking of his one ewe-lamb.

"Strokes. But that Miss Auberon is so lucky—I doubt it'll be his first and last." Then, suddenly espying me, in dubious neighbourhood, she said: "My dear! A terrible blow for your sister!"

At that moment I saw Sylvia enter the hall, in which there was only the light of two great log fires—one at each end of it; she made a sign to me, and I went over to her.

"Come up to our room," she said, and we went up together; the curtains were drawn close, and the room was full of warm firelight. We stood together on the rug, and she leant one elbow on the chimney-piece, looking down gravely into the fire. "I have seen Hampden," she said, "and he thinks his father must be—he seems to have very little hope." She was pale, and shivered as she spoke.

"It must be a horrible shock to him," I said.

"Yes. He is a devoted son. I think he cared most for his mother; but he will feel his father's death very much. He is going at once: he and Mr. Auld-Baillie are going together. There is a train to Dulchurch at half-past five, and they will travel that far together; then Mr. Auld-Baillie can catch the North express, but there is no quick train to Monksbridge till after eight. I advised Hampden to take a special, and he is going to do so."

All this she said very gravely, and it was easy to see that the news had really moved her. The idea of death, brought thus near ourselves, shocked and almost frightened her.

For a few minutes we said nothing; then she sat down and went on thoughtfully—

"I am considering exactly how we ought to behave. We must be very careful; all these people will watch us. Our position is peculiar: though you refused him, Mr. Auld-Baillie proposed to you to-day, and he will not accept your refusal as final."

"But, Sylvia, it was final; I can't see what this has to do with it. Of course I am very sorry that he has had this sad news, so must every one in the house be; but it doesn't concern me more than any one else here."

"Yes, it does. Every one will think it does. They all know he wants to marry you, and——"

"If they do know that, they know that I don't want to marry *him*. Does any one on earth imagine that a girl is bound to change her mind because the man she has just refused has lost a cousin? That's nonsense."

"Yes, that's nonsense; but that's what you say. They will watch you to see how you behave. That isn't nonsense."

Then, seeing I was becoming rebellious, she turned quickly to another consideration.

"I, at all events, am engaged," she said. "If we were married, of course I should go away with him, and take you with me. That is impossible as it is now."

She paused and pondered, and went on—

"We certainly cannot leave to-night. Fortunately there is no dinner-party—only the people in the house."

"Thirty of them!" I suggested.

"Eight and twenty after Hampden and Mr. Auld-

Baillie are gone. Simply the people in the house. I have asked Hampden to telegraph first thing in the morning, it will be too late to-night. If there is . . . any change . . . of course we will leave at once, and I would ask Lady Severn to let us breakfast up here, so that we could go straight down to the carriage. But if his father is better I don't think we should go till later in the day. They are going to dance after dinner; it was to have been your first dance; I'm sorry, but there's no help for it. After all it's easier to arrange than if *only* the Duke—that *would* have been a puzzle! For you to be dancing——"

She paused and shook her head; grave and shocked as she was, it gave her a sober satisfaction to think how a Duke's death should complicate the question of her sister's dancing.

At that moment a knock was heard at the door; it was a housemaid who said that one of the footmen was outside with a message from Mr. Monk—would Miss Auberon be good enough to come to him, for a moment, in the library; he was just leaving.

"Come, Marjory," said Sylvia, rising at once. But I didn't see why I should go.

"Please come," she repeated, and I went with her, the footman going down before us to open the door. In the library I saw no one but Mr. Monk, who came forward, and touched my hand; to my great relief I understood that I was not expected to say anything. He looked darker than ever, and paler. A moment later I found that he was not the only person in the room besides Sylvia and myself. Mr. Auld-Baillie was there, standing in the shadow of a huge recess away from the fire and the lamps. Before I saw him

I had moved a little apart from Sylvia and Hampden, and he came forward at the same moment.

"I am going," he said, "on a solemn errand—not a sad one; for my poor cousin was very old, and he has long ceased to live, to all intents and purposes. He had had a previous seizure, and it deprived him of all sense and power of recognition. He did not feel his life a burden, because he did not know he was alive; and he has been thus for two years; he might have lived on thus a long time. I thought perhaps he would. I did not mention him to-day in speaking to you; it would have been an indelicacy. This is no time to re-open what we were then discussing."

I agreed with him and bowed a silent assent.

"No, of course," he went on calmly. "Even if there were time."

Then he held out a hand that I had no choice but to take, and said—

"Good-bye. I ask your recollection and your prayers—added duties come upon me. Good-bye; but even at this moment it is right that I should tell you again that I cannot take as final your decision of this morning: I shall seek you out in your own home." He glanced at Sylvia, and I knew she had told him he might come. "In your mother's house I shall look for you, and in her I shall look for a wise ally."

He glanced at Hampden Monk, and I knew that he counted on an ally there too.

I was angry with all three of them—not with poor innocent Mamma—but with Sylvia, and Hampden, and him, and knew well they had made time to conclude some treaty, two and two probably, during the earlier part of that fateful, slow afternoon. But how could

I turn on them *then?* Hampden Monk I had never really liked, now I knew clearly that I disliked him: was Sylvia going to make me turn against her too? There was no objection on earth to disliking Mr. Auld-Baillie, but I could not at that moment flare up at him, in the midst of his solemn mourning that did not even pretend to be grief.

"Good-bye," I said, drawing my hand back coldly.

"And you will remember me?"

"Not," I answered in a low voice, "if I can help it."

He reddened as he had done that morning; and Hampden saw it, if he had not heard me. He looked my way, more brotherly-in-law than brotherly, and the butler, to my great relief, opened the door, and, coming forward a little way, bowed to Mr. Auld-Baillie.

"Your lordship's carriage is at the door," he said in a voice that reminded one of Court Mourning.

There are temptations that even the most perfect of butlers can't resist, and this butler, though he was sure the Earl of Inverchlory's new honours should be decorously ignored till after the late Duke's funeral, could not resist being the first to "my lord" him.

"*Have* you anything gray?" Sylvia asked me the moment the door had closed upon our two young men. For the first time in her life she was a little bit frightened of me, and she wanted to forestall anything I might have to say. "Have you anything grey? Your new dresses are—not, of course, *brilliant*, but certainly bright. Grey would be exactly the colour. *I* have a grey gown——"

"No. I have nothing grey. But, Sylvia, please understand once and for all that I *have* refused Mr. Auld-Baillie finally. Neither you, nor he, nor Hampden shall interfere with me. I have never tried to interfere in your affairs, and——"

At that moment the door opened again, and Sylvia, I am sure, had never been so glad to see Lady Severn as she was then.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Miss Beaufront was right; Lord Monksbridge's stroke was his first and his last. About half-past eight next morning Lady Severn received a telegram from Mr. Monk asking her to break to Sylvia the news of his father's death. We were already up, and Lady Severn came to our room; she made me a little sign and I went out, leaving her alone with my sister. Outside I found Hermione, who took me into Lady Severn's own sitting-room on the same corridor.

"It is very sad," she said at once, "and I feel such a pig for having talked to you as I did yesterday about Sylvia. Last night I talked to her a little, and tried to be nice. She feels it; and she says what an attached son Mr. Monk was."

"Yes; he is. Though I think he liked his mother best, and it's the best thing about him."

"I understand. I've heard of her, and she's rather queer, isn't she?"

"Yes, but really nice."

"I know. *I* should like her best, too, best of the family; but she wasn't in his line quite, and so you're right about its being the best thing about him, his being so fond of her."

"Hermione, we're going away at once, and I can't help saying things I oughtn't; I am *very* sorry for Hampden, but he's not in my good books. He and Sylvia—in a while, when all this trouble is past a little—will try to interfere with me, about—about——"

"About Mr. Auld-Baillie?"

"Yes. He wants to come and stay at Cross Place; and even if I can stop that, I can't prevent Hampden asking him to Llanthamy. It's horrid thinking and talking of such things now, but Mr. Auld-Baillie talked of it again last night, just before he went away; and Sylvia and Hampden were there. I could see they were on his side, and that they and he had made a league against me."

"Marjory! Remember *I'm* on your side, and so is Briggy. We're not much account, but we're on your side; and if he comes to Cross Place, or Llanthamy, and they are bothering you, I'll tell you what to do—just come to us, to Mount Cressy, or *here,* if you'd like it better, and I'll be here to meet you. Just telegraph, and Mamma will write and ask you, or Aunt Muriel if it's to be here——"

Lady Severn came in and interrupted us, and said I had better go to my sister; then, very kindly indeed, she held my hand and said—

"Your first visit to us has had a sad ending, Marjory; but you must come again——"

"Aunt Muriel," said Hermione, "let her come when it's not a big party: when only Mamma and we are here, and——"

"But, Glorum, perhaps she would find that dull."

"No, she wouldn't. Would you, Marjory?"

"I should like it much best," I said, and then Lady Severn kissed me, and I went away to Sylvia. She was at breakfast, in her grey gown, attended by a housemaid, with a face at half-mast, of whose presence I was glad, as it prevented conversation.

On the stairs Lord Severn was waiting to say good-bye; he was very kind and quiet, saying very little, but exactly, as it seemed to me, what was right. He also hoped to see us again. Of Hampden Monk he spoke with respectful sympathy. "He," he said, "will have to console his poor mother. *You*"—to Sylvia—"will be *his* best consolation."

He spoke of seeing them both, together, at Severn Court again, in happier days, evidently meaning when they were married. To me he said a little word in my ear, as we went down.

"*You* must come without waiting for them to bring you," he almost whispered. "Briggy and Hermione count on having you more to themselves."

Briggy was there, in a darkish corner of the stairs; he slipped forward and said—

"Mind, you're to come back; or Glorum and I will go and kidnap you."

Then he disappeared, and we went down to the hall, where the Bishop was tapping a barometer with a simplicity that might have deceived the very elect, but I was not elect, and was not in the least deceived. He had not decided that it Set Fair till Sylvia had gone by, then he turned to me, and squeezed my hand, or, rather, my mackintosh which I was holding in it, and murmured—

"God bless you both! God bless you *all*. Assure your dear mother of my sympathy."

I longed to remind him that it was Lady Monksbridge who had lost her husband, or rather that my mother's own loss was not very recent; but, of course, I wouldn't, and, when I came to think of it, it did not seem very necessary. He was obviously aware of it.

Hovering round the dining-room door, I was conscious of a whirl of petticoats suggestive of Miss Beaufront, and hoped she would nab the Bishop. She would have thought more highly of me had she known how cordially I wished to see her reigning over Rood Palace, and how readily I would have sacrificed poor Miss Garboyle; still my conscience pricked me for that sandy-eyebrowed virgin, and the notion of Miss Beaufront as a stepmother shook me so that, as we drove away, I almost forgot that Fate herself could never make that warrior marry Mamma.

The station-master was fully aware of Sylvia's loss—perhaps of mine, and he scouted the porters, and was almost jealous of the footman, as he led us to our carriage, without, I am sure, the least thought of tips.

"The carriage is Reserved," he whispered, touching his cap (usually worn at a taking angle, now solemnly straight) for the thirteenth time. He was clearly of opinion that we required total solitude for the indulgence of our noble grief. And the guard stood by as though it depended on *us* when the train should move on; the convenience of an abject public mattered nothing when it was a question of two young ladies prostrated, one by the death of a Lord, and one by that of a Duke. Had we been hurrying home to the funeral of our own father, the late Reverend Peter Auberon, would the milk-cans have been smuggled stealthily into the train with a warning "Hsh!" from the senior porter?

Of course, Death is more dreadful than the impending threat of it; and certainly Sylvia had a more lugubrious air as we were assisted into that railway-carriage than she had worn last night by our fire, or than she had assumed half an hour ago as we shook hands with our host.

As the train moved away she said, " People talk of the decay of a proper spirit among the lower classes. The right feeling is still there. It is gratifying. It's all very well for sarcastic old women, like Mrs. de Braose, to sneer at new titles, but Lord Monksbridge was Somebody after all. His political position was high. His name, one sees, was well known to people like these."

" So," I observed angrily, " was the Duke of Iona's. That station-master could not trust me to climb into the carriage without his hand under my elbow. It's an awful thing for England when a Duke dies who didn't know for two years if he was alive or dead."

" Marjory! It is indecent to talk like that—in your position too."

" Then it was indecent for him to tell me. *I* shouldn't have known if he hadn't told me. My position! I have no position, except that I'm Marjory Auberon, and all the nonsense on earth will never make me Marjory Auld-Baillie."

" ' Marjory Inverchlory.' " I saw her lips forming the correction; and, with all her, perfectly just, horror of my indecency, it was as plain as no part of her face that she treated that future Countess with an indulgent patience that Marjory Auberon could never have quite reckoned on half a year before.

Perkin met us, and somehow he looked younger than when we had gone away a week before; certainly I felt older. He was very nice to Sylvia, and very quiet and gentle with us both.

The reader may remember that the station was several miles from Monksbridge, and he told us that Lady Llantwddwy had sent her carriage for us. It was certainly kind of her, and made me think of Traddles lending David Copperfield his pillow on the night when the news came that David's mother was dead.

As we drove home, Perkin told us that Lord Monksbridge had been alive, but unconscious, when Hampden had arrived; an hour later he had become conscious, and had spoken to his wife and son, and he mentioned Sylvia, saying that he hoped they would not much delay their marriage on account of his death.

Sylvia was touched when Perkin said how she had been remembered, but she shook her head when she heard that Lord Monksbridge did not wish the marriage to be long postponed.

" There was another thing," our brother went on, " it shows what a kind and thoughtful man he was, and it shows that he had been feeling ill—he told them, Lady Monksbridge and Hampden, that, a few days before, he had added something to his will, leaving Sylvia ten thousand pounds in case he should die before she and his son were married."

" Yes," said our sister, " he was kind; it *was* thoughtful," and for the first time she cried.

Mamma was crying, too, when she met us in the hall at home. As soon as we were in the drawing-room she brought out a letter that had come from Hampden Monk after Perkin had gone to fetch us.

" He wrote early this morning," she said, " and sent the note over by a groom—he had written last night too, just after getting home. I must say he is very thoughtful." Then she told us what we had heard already from Perkin. "*This* letter," she went on, "is to ask if you would go to Llanthamy."

"Oh, Mamma! I don't think that would be the right thing at all," said Sylvia. "We are only engaged. To go there now, at once, before the funeral—I'm sure it wouldn't be the right thing."

"My dear!" Mamma pleaded, with more independence of Sylvia's opinion than I had ever seen her show, "I think that does not matter if they want you. He speaks of his mother."

Perkin said nothing, but he looked at Sylvia much less gently, and turned away to the fire almost impatiently. I could not help understanding that she had not meant to go to Llanthamy Castle till—till the poor dead man should be buried; and I felt half angry with her like Perkin. Rather to my surprise Mamma persisted.

"They are in such trouble——" she began.

"Yes; it is a trouble for us all," Sylvia interrupted, not without obstinacy.

"But it is a trouble," Mamma said simply, "that belongs specially to you. To *us* it must chiefly be a trouble as it affects you. He speaks of his mother's loneliness—there is no lady in the house. Sylvia darling, you ought to go. He sent a carriage and the letter with it; the carriage is waiting in the coach-yard now."

"Mamma—he and I are not married. He is a young man and does not understand. I think you ought to write and say that——"

"No, dear, I cannot do that; if you will not go, you must write yourself."

"But he wrote to you——"

"Because you were not here. I think you must go—or else write to him yourself. He knows you are here by now, and he will expect you to go; if not, at least to write—remember he has heard nothing from you since his father died."

I was really astonished at Mamma's firmness, she was usually like wax in Sylvia's hands. And I was surprised, too, at Perkin's forbearance. He stood, looking into the fire, with an ashamed expression on his face, but without any outburst of interference.

"How could he have heard anything from me?" Sylvia complained; "we came away directly the telegram arrived. I am famished and frozen——"

Then Perkin broke down.

"And Marjory?" he said. "I suppose she's cold and hungry too; but we're not bothering much about *her*." For once I behaved myself, and interrupted on the side of peace.

"I'm all right," I said. "But Sylvia must either go or write. I think it would be easier for her to go. But" (and I was thinking of poor Lady Monksbridge, and thinking too of how Lord Severn had said to my sister: '*You* must be *his* consolation,' for, if Hampden naturally wished to have Sylvia with him, I was sure Mamma would be a greater comfort to Lady Monksbridge) "I don't think any one could expect her to go alone. Dear Mamma! Why not go with her? You are a widow too, and I'm sure you would be a comfort to poor Lady Monksbridge."

Sylvia, even at that moment, was irritated at my allusion to Mamma's widowhood, and the truth was she did not want to go at all, either with or without Mamma. But Mamma was against her.

"Yes," she said; "that will be best. I will go——"

"Why can't you go without me?" Sylvia suddenly demanded. And Perkin spoke again.

"If you do that," he said, in a low voice—"if you let her go alone—we shall all be ashamed of you."

And I made no protest of denial—nor did Mamma.

Sylvia hardly ever blushed. But a slight, slow blush crept up her neck and spread over her cheeks. She gave in; but I doubt if she ever forgave that calm, cold speech of Perkin's.

When they were gone he turned to me.

"Muggles! I shall *never* understand her," he said. "Is it *all* propriety? Is it all just because she doesn't think people will think it 'the right thing' for her to be at Llanthamy now, when she's only engaged?"

"No, Perkin; not all because of that. I think it is because she has a horror of dead people, and is *afraid*."

"Afraid! Of what?"

"Of being in the house with *him*"—and Perkin knew I meant Lord Monksbridge—"of, perhaps, having to see him."

"Poor Hampden Monk!" said Perkin. "I'm not in love with him myself, but——"

"Perkin, that's not fair. She can't help feeling like that. Some people can't. She was never more sincere in her life."

"That's just it," he answered, and his voice made me think of Hermione.

PART III

CHAPTER XXXV

In spite of the late Lord Monksbridge's wish that his son and my sister should not greatly delay their marriage on account of his death, it did not take place for a full year. Sylvia would not hear of it. She put on exactly the right degree of mourning for a man who was her future husband's father, but was not her father-in-law; and by unhurried, but careful, degrees changed it, till, within six months, she was not in mourning at all. But she would not be persuaded to marry during the first year of Lady Monksbridge's widowhood. Hampden, though there was nothing much in his dress to betray it, was, she insisted, still in deep mourning. He pleaded, and his mother obediently backed him; but Sylvia, with utmost gentleness, remained firm.

" Dear Lady Monksbridge," she declared, " you say what he tells you; but *you* know I am right. It would be a lack of respect."

Lady Monksbridge, like all people who are assured of possessing special wisdom, felt that she *did* know Sylvia was right, though she could not have told any one why.

I think I could have enlightened her. Sylvia's great scheme of elevating the Monksbridge family was not to be spoiled by the death of the first lord of that name. But it would be spoiled if mere impatience should not allow her to postpone its execution. During the early period of her engagement, she felt she had done a great deal for the second lord's position; much that she had done would be wasted if she had agreed to a marriage while her husband was still in mourning. The wedding must have been very quiet, and, after it, the bride and bridegroom might have gone abroad, but they could not have gone a round of great visits. How hard would it have then become to strike upon a moment wherein the new Lord and Lady Monksbridge could have assumed, naturally and inevitably, the position Sylvia intended for them.

"I have promised," she told Mamma, "all those girls that they should be bridesmaids." (There were ten of them, and the lowliest was an earl's daughter, a Scotch earl, but a Knight of the Thistle.) "Our domestic troubles are no reason for disappointing them. If we married at all quickly, there could hardly be *any* bridesmaids—only Marjory to hold one's bouquet."

Certainly the only existing Lady Monksbridge understood none of this; but Sylvia made her think there should be no hurry, and her own impatience for a daughter-in-law was not vehement. Meanwhile, Miss Auberon's determination to abstain from a wedding too soon after a funeral made the Monksbridgians attribute "more heart" to that young lady than they had been ready to suspect. Old Lady Llantwddwy was much impressed—till old Mrs. de Braose had scoffed away her sentimental applause over a cup of tea with buttery muffins. Lady Gladws de Braose assured her family that Miss Auberon was "supreme"—a dictum which her brother-in-law seemed inclined first to accept literally, and then to resent.

"Ah!" said Sylvia to me one day, standing in front of Bishop Latimer's portrait. "Your affair with Lord Inverchlory bothered me for the moment! I wanted that fifteen hundred pounds badly for Mamma. Your affair with him put it out of the question."

"You said it would be all right if I did not mean to marry him!" I reminded her, not without temper; "and I certainly don't."

"Did I? You probably misunderstood me. As things are, any money dealings, even about a picture, would be more impossible than ever."

"There aren't any 'things.'"

Sylvia shook her head. "It doesn't matter now," she observed, without the least temper. "Lord Monksbridge's thoughtfulness made the money of no account."

It was the first time she had mentioned Lord Inverchlory to me since we had returned home, but I knew she had told Mamma about him, for Mamma could not help speaking of it to me.

"My dear," she said complacently, "so your very first visit anywhere without me brought you your first proposal."

"My last too, I hope, if the others were to be like it."

Poor Mamma almost jumped. "But I understand," she said, "that he is a charming young man!"

"He may charm Sylvia; he didn't charm me at all."

"Oh, of course there could be no idea of his charming her—she has only Hampden to think of. But she said he was quite excellent, and universally esteemed."

"I have no objection to esteem him universally. But, Mamma dear, please don't take Sylvia's side against me."

"Against *you*, my dear?"

"Yes; you will be against me if you join Hampden and Sylvia. I know they want me to marry him."

"Because he is so good—of such an excellent character."

"Oh, Mamma! One can't marry all the people who are good and of excellent character. Young Slimber, the dairyman, is goodness itself, and perfectly excellent. He teaches the third class of boys in the Sunday school, and all the butter in his shop would not melt in his mouth."

"But, dear, he is a common man—a dairyman, as you say."

"Exactly. And Lord Inverchlory is an Earl. The cases are altogether different."

"That's what I say," said Mamma, quite puzzled, which served my turn as well as anything else. I did not want to discuss my respectable wooer at all.

I soon discovered that Mamma had told Perkin, who gathered that a titled Sunday-school teacher, somehow connected with the dairy industry, had been smitten with my charms. He did not understand that I had exactly refused the tender of this mealy-mouthed young nobleman's hand, and was rather severe at first.

"I knew you'd get into mischief," he remarked austerely. "You didn't take long. I suppose Sylvia engineered it."

"No, she didn't," I assured him, for I like to be fair. And then I told him all about it, explaining that Lord Inverchlory was not mealy-mouthed or hypocritical, but quite a good sort of man except for the one great fault of thinking I would make a good Lady Inverchlory.

"And," inquired Perkin judicially, "you really said

'No'—flat and straight? Mamma seemed to think he was to 'cut and come again.'"

"That was Sylvia. And Sylvia knows quite well I said 'No,' only she chooses to forget it now. I couldn't exactly tell him to 'cut,' but the last word I said to him was that I would never see him again if I could help it. I believe she heard me; I'm sure Hampden did."

"Did he propose before Hampden and Sylvia?"

Then I had to make further explanations, ending by telling him how Hermione and Briggy were on my side, and would help me—also how they proposed to do it.

"All right," said Perkin, now quite satisfied of my innocence. "I don't see what you could do better. If he really comes here, just you let them know, and if you have to telegraph, I'll send off the telegram for you. But I should think that would not be necessary. He can't very well come to stay without writing to ask if he may, and you would know that, and could write yourself to Glorum——"

"Perkin, you shouldn't call her Glorum. Her name is Lady Hermione Cressy, and she's grown up—at least she's nearly seventeen."

"Well, she calls me Perkin, and I'm Mr. Peter Auberon," he answered cheerfully. "She and Briggy are good chaps, I can see that. But mind this—if you change your mind and sprout out into Mrs. Auld Crankie Castle, I shall know what to think of *you.*"

"Tut! Auld Crankie Castle is a thing, so to speak, of the past. But I don't intend to be Countess of Inverchlory of Inver Palace, etc.—not even if our Papa-in-law of Rood Palace wishes it."

Then Perkin skipped, and I created a diversion from my own affairs. I must say I thought it rather selfish of him to be much more deeply concerned by his own danger of having an episcopal stepfather than he had been by my danger of having Lord Inverchlory for a husband.

To return to Sylvia. For several months she remained at Cross Place. Then she began to go away again "a-Duking," as Perkin and Hermione called it; in the first instance without either Mamma or me, and still in a very slight mourning. Before accepting the invitation she explained that she would rather not go if there was, by any chance, to be dancing in the house; nor did she accept till she had made Hampden (rather reluctantly) refuse—for he also had been asked.

On the next occasion, the new Lord Monksbridge accepted by return of post—and Sylvia went, but took Mamma. There was no dancing, only *tableaux vivants,* and *tableaux* are not incompatible with the later stages of half-mourning; but my sister firmly declined taking any part in them—even that of Lady Jane Grey in the beheading scene. "And really," Mamma confessed to me on her return, "I thought that would be mourning."

"Sylvia," I observed, "has a correct mind. Mourning can hardly be said to begin till the death has occurred."

"Yes, I didn't think of that. They had two executions—young Sir Budleigh Salterton had an executioner's suit, block and all, and he liked using it. Charles I. was done too; Lord Wrekin, you know, in a shirt that really belonged to him."

"Didn't the other gentlemen's shirts belong to them?"

"Oh yes. But the King gave the shirt he was beheaded in to Lord Wrekin's ancestors just before (or just after)——"

"Who," I interrupted suspiciously, "was Bishop Juxon?"

"Lord Alured Mohun (*moon* they call it); he had just been ordained; and the Bishop wouldn't be—though some of them said it would be so splendid to have a real Bishop."

"To match the real block."

"Yes, I suppose. But the Bishop told me he couldn't think of it. It would be *acting,* even though he didn't say anything; besides he couldn't do anything to countenance Dr. Juxon, or Charles I. either, who were, he thinks, much of a muchness."

Within a few days of that little conversation I became aware that the Bishop of Lowminster was coming to Monksbridge, and that Lord Inverchlory was expected at Llanthamy Castle; and I thought their lordships much of a muchness too.

CHAPTER XXXVI

I HAD been to see Miss Belvoir, who was on the *qui-vive* to perceive herself neglected since my visit to Severn Court, though it had given her intense satisfaction to pump me about all the smart company I had met there, concerning whom she seemed to know much more than I did.

"Ah! Lady Agincourt, yes," she had remarked. "You might think the title goes back to Henry V., but it was only created by James I. Sir James Cressy was one of his whipping-boys. I remember the last Earl died in November, '65, and there are two co-heiresses. Beaufront—she would be an aunt of the present Baronet; the first was a dandy under the Regent, and lent him money—of course he was never paid back, but George IV. gave him a baronetcy. The Severns have always been Whigs" (Miss Belvoir was a passionate Tory), "and had the Whig knack of marrying great fortunes and keeping them in the family. They began with a Parliamentary general of no position, but related to the Protector's wife; but they got no title till William of Orange's time, he gave them their Viscountcy, and George I. added the Earldom; after Culloden, where the Earl distinguished himself (on the wrong side, of course), George II. gave the Marquessate. Very big people."

"Lord Severn is very little."

And then Miss Belvoir applied for a description of the reigning Marquess, and statistics as to his household.

"So," she observed presently, "you met the Bishop of Lowminster—Garboyle; his father was a college-scout at Oxford, and saved money enough to marry a widow with a good inn, but not very young. There was only the one child and they put him to a good school and then sent him to Cambridge. Our Warden here was an undergraduate with him, and knows all about him. The Whig bishops are generally nobodies."

Of the Bishop's friend, Mr. Auld-Baillie, I made no mention, though I knew that Miss Belvoir would have treated me with much more respect had she suspected that the coronet of a highly Whig countess had been within my grasp. Had I clutched it, she would not have thought me spoiled even though my visits had degenerated in frequency. Sylvia hardly ever went near her; when she did, she was treated with much more consideration than I was.

On the present occasion Miss Belvoir informed me that Mrs. FitzSimon had called that morning.

"When she comes in a morning it is always for something special; your Bishop, that Lowminster man you met at Lord Severn's, is coming to preach for the Warden."

"When?" I inquired eagerly.

"Not to-morrow—to-morrow week. He wrote to the Warden and reminded him of their college days together, and seemed quite sentimental about them. (I dare say, if Mrs. FitzSimon knew all, they had fine doings up at Cambridge.) He evidently hinted at a visit, for the Warden promptly asked him to come and preach; and he accepted at once. Mrs. Fitz is all of a tilly-willy; she loves to have a My Lord to show her big rooms to, but she's cross with her Warden for not being a Bishop himself. 'They were in the same college' (not much of a college either—Ely's not much better than a hall), she said, 'and Garboyle was not at all a leading man there—he had no scholarship. By what I can make out, the Warden never saw anything in him, or anybody else up at Cambridge; but he bought a proprietary chapel up in town (with his mother's savings from the beer, I suppose), and preached to old women who liked the idea of faith much better than works, and drank a lot of tea with them, out of church, and prescribed for their sick poodles, and prayed over their own indigestions.'"

"Miss Belvoir," I protested, "I don't believe Mrs. Fitz ever said that."

"Well, perhaps not in those words. I make the best of her. She's not very amusing in her way of telling things, is she? However, that's the gist of it—according to her, Garboyle muffined himself into society. Where rich old women are, nephews and brothers are never far off; and he had a lot of tact and talk, and knew exactly what friends were worth making—so the long and short of it is that he's a bishop, and any My Lord is better than no My Lord, and Mrs. Fitz is glad to get him; but the Warden ought to be My Lord too, and his lady thinks it must be his fault. She's a Whig, like the Dean, her papa, and if she had married a Whig Warden all might have been well."

"And," I asked, "is the Bishop coming to *stay* with them at Warden's Lodge?"

"Of course he is. That's what the sermon's for. There'd be no point in it without. There'll be dinners and a social evening; she'll show the Bishop to Monksbridge, and show the de Braoses, and Lady Llantwddwy, and Lord Monksbridge to the Bishop."

I was glad he was not coming to stay with *us*, anyway; but—would he not—would he not come on to us?

When I got home I announced his advent with intentional abruptness.

"The Bishop," said I, with a keen eye on Sylvia, "is coming. Did you know?"

"The Bishop!" cried Sylvia. "Why, he's just been." (Monksbridge, of course, is not in the Lowminster diocese.) "He was here last month. Everybody was confirmed—they can't be done over again."

As if Sylvia was to be entrapped by the likes of me! But Mamma, if ever in her life she dropped a stitch without noticing it, dropped one then.

"Besides," said Sylvia, "he has gone abroad."

"Oh, it's not *our* Bishop," I explained. "And he's not coming to confirm anybody; only to preach for the Warden, who was his boon companion at Cambridge——"

"Marjory!" murmured our mother.

"Well, whatever young bishops and wardens are before they blow out."

"Blow out!" gasped Mamma.

"The Bishop of where?" asked Sylvia, overdoing innocence by a shade.

"There's no Bishop of Ware," I reminded her, humorously. "But you've heard of a Bishop of Lowminster."

"Why didn't you say so at once?" asked Sylvia, still almost too innocently. "Is he coming to stay with the Warden? He was at Lord Wrekin's, and he didn't mention it. Mamma, did the Bishop of Lowminster tell you he was coming to stay with Dr. FitzSimon?"

Sylvia I would watch inexorably. Mamma I could not. I might, if I liked, have studied both of them in the mirror opposite, but I went over to the fire and poked it, quite noisily.

Still I heard Mamma's answer.

"No, dear. He didn't. But I remember him saying—twice—that he had a great desire to visit Monksbridge; and—and—that the place had a special at—att—interest for him."

I did not turn my head; but sat on the hearthrug, poking the fire, and looking into it and into myself. Why, I suddenly asked myself, if *she* (I would not say "Mamma")—if she should really want to marry this Bishop, why should I wish to prevent her? I wouldn't let anybody, Sylvia, or even *her,* interfere with *my* life; what right had I, after all, to interfere with hers? To me the Bishop seemed a silly, tiresome old man; but if, if really, she would like to be his wife, no doubt she did not think him dull and foolish. I could not pretend to believe that he would be harsh or overbearing to her, or in any way unkind; he was not specially selfish, or indecorously self-indulgent. If he must needs marry again, was it not in his favour that he did not look about for money, or a title, or youthful beauty—but should be content with quiet goodness and sweetness like hers? At least there could be no worldliness in his choice. And, if she too must needs marry again, would it not be well that she should choose just such an one as he? He was not young; it would have been horrible had she fancied some pretty fellow younger than herself; but neither was he old, or repulsive; no doubt he was a good man, and of his house she would be a fit and gracious mistress, provoking no animosities —reason seemed all against me; only prejudice and instinct, and the unforgettable certainty how Perkin would hate it, were on my side.

I beat a certain block of coal half savagely, and could not turn round. A small tear oozed out of one eye; there *was* something else. Even to myself I would not say it, but—but, if this thing came about I could not help feeling that I should have lost something I worshipped when my dear, dear mother was no longer our father's widow, but that sleek stranger's wife; and what I did say was that it would be Sylvia's doing. *Why* couldn't she leave us alone? Of ambition dear Mamma was as utterly incapable as she was of scheming, but Sylvia would *place* us all, and her terrible sense of fitness showed her no possible stepfather more absolutely fit than an elderly irreproachable bishop.

I heard the door open and close again, and when I turned to look over my shoulder Mamma was gone. Since I could remember anything, had she tried to have a secret from me? Now I knew that she thought she had one.

"Sylvia!" I said angrily, getting up from the floor and facing round upon her, "you intend marrying that old goose to her."

I think she was rather glad to have it "out" with me; things had reached a point when it would be convenient to have the matter recognized.

"*You* are the goose," she replied, with a perfectly easy laugh, "the marriages of bishops are not arranged for them by young ladies."

"You do not deny that this marriage is likely."

"No, I think it probable. He was at Lord Wrekin's and paid her attention. I have no doubt that his coming to the Warden's was his own idea, and that it shows he has made up his mind."

I looked around the pleasant room and said abruptly—

"And when your plans are crowned with success what will happen to Cross Place? You will have your home, she will have hers—is this to be mine and Perkin's?"

"Perkin has gained this great scholarship, and this is his last term at Abbot's School, next term he will be at Oxford——"

"And is he to have no *home?*" I interrupted fiercely.

"Of course he would spend his vacations at the Palace with Mamma," she answered coolly.

"Would he? With all your cleverness there are two people in the world you do not understand, one is your brother and the other is your sister. You may be certain of this, that Perkin will never live at Rood Palace——"

"There is no question of his living there. He will live at Oxford."

"And have *no* home!" I cried bitterly. "Sylvia, why cannot I live on here, and make it a home for him?"

"That is nonsense. How could you, an unmarried girl, live here alone?—he would only be here for a few weeks now and then. Besides, it would be convenient to let Cross Place; it would let furnished for a good rent, and it would be much better for Mamma to have the money as a private income; *I,* of course, would need none of it; Perkin will be well off with his scholarship, and you——"

"And I?"

"Will have a house and an income of your own."

"Will I? I told you that there were *two* people you didn't understand, and I am one of them."

CHAPTER XXXVII

At that moment the door again opened, and there entered to us Mamma, Lady Monksbridge, her son, and my brother. After leaving the drawing-room, Mamma had met Perkin in the hall, just coming in, and they had stayed thus, talking; a few minutes later Lord and Lady Monksbridge had arrived.

After our greetings had been exchanged Hampden said aloud so all might hear, though ostensibly to Sylvia—

"Inverchlory is coming to stay with my mother and me next week. I have asked him to speak at a meeting in Llanthamy on Thursday, and he is coming to us on Wednesday."

Perkin shot a little glance at me, and I saw his lips form the word "Telegram?" I nodded, and listened. Mamma, I saw, was troubled and uneasy, but that I thought was due to her supposed secret about the Bishop. Perkin also looked as though he had something on his mind, and I thought it very nice of him to be so sympathetic with my annoyance about Lord Inverchlory's coming.

"I," said my brother-in-law elect, "shall take the Chair at the meeting and introduce him; Inverchlory speaks very well."

"Is the meeting about Nuns?" I asked.

"Nuns! It is a political meeting; he is a Whig, as I am."

"Oh. They said at Severn Court that he could only make speeches about the Inspection of Convents."

Hampden looked annoyed, and I had a shrewd suspicion (and a correct one, as it happened) that Lord Inverchlory had bargained for a free hand, and would only speak on Whig politics if he were allowed to bring in the vital question of Convent inspection.

"Another friend of ours is coming to the neighbourhood," Hampden went on, rather hurriedly, "the Bishop of Lowminster is coming to Warden's Lodge to preach for Dr. FitzSimon to the school. There will be an address of welcome, the Warden tells me, and one of the senior boys will read it—perhaps Peter." (Hampden never called him "Perkin.") "Now that he has taken the Cardinal Scholarship he is quite their big gun."

"It certainly will not be read by me," Perkin answered; and I saw at once that something was going to happen.

"Why shouldn't it be you?" Lord Monksbridge asked, with some sharpness. "I believe the Warden intends it."

Perkin paused for a moment, and looked at Mamma, who shook her head dismally. Then he spoke, in a low but clear voice that we could all hear.

"Because," he said, "I am going to do something that will make it impossible. I think you are right in supposing that the Warden will ask me to read the address—perhaps he will do so when I go back to College now; what I shall tell him will make it impossible. Probably he will agree that I had better return home at once, and I shall not belong to Abbot's next week."

"What does all this mean?" Hampden asked, with a cold annoyance. "You choose to be mysterious. Your friends will be much surprised to learn that you can have anything to tell the Warden which would necessitate your leaving the school."

"But it is so. I am going to become a Catholic."

Lady Monksbridge skipped in her chair; Mamma gave a little groan; Sylvia reddened (and I have said how seldom she flushed), and exclaimed—

"Idiot!" in an angrier voice than I had ever heard her use.

Her betrothed put on a frown that was not unlike a scowl, and said—

"It would be an odd subject for a jest; but I find it hard to believe you serious."

"I am very serious," Perkin replied, and he sighed as he spoke. He was now standing behind Mamma's chair, and he laid a hand gently on her shoulder. There was half the room between him and me, and I thought how lonely he looked.

"What mad whim is this?" asked Hampden, with a sour scorn.

"It is not new. It has been coming on during many months."

"And you kept it a secret till now!"

"No. As soon as I thought my misgivings might end as they *have* ended I told my mother. No one else had any right to know till I was certain. And she would feel bound in honour to tell no one else till I gave her leave."

"Gave her leave, indeed!" cried Hampden.

"I thought it was a fancy, and would pass away," Mamma murmured, shaking her head grievously.

"Of course you judged it to be a fancy—it *was* a fancy, it *is* a fancy," Hampden said, with loud impatience. "And you, Sir, behaved dishonourably in binding her to silence on her honour."

Then Perkin flushed also. "I did not bind her," he answered quietly; "I can trust my mother's honour without binding her."

And I saw that he pressed the hand that rested on her shoulder gently down.

"She was mistaken. She should have consulted *me*. I regard myself as her eldest son. I consider that *you* should have consulted me."

"You may regard yourself as her eldest son; but I regard myself as her only son, and what I didn't tell my own sisters I never even dreamt of telling you. It did not concern you at all."

"But it did. It does. It concerns all who are connected with your family. Your selfish folly, should you persist in it, may (probably will) affect most lamentably your mother and one of your sisters. But there is room to hope that you will discard the folly—probably no one except ourselves is aware of your absurdity."

"No one but yourselves is aware that I intend to become a Catholic; but the Warden will be aware to-day."

"And you intend to tell him?"

"I have told you so."

"And how will you excuse yourself to him? What explanation of your misconduct shall you have to offer?"

"Lord Monksbridge, you may be my mother's eldest son, but you have mistaken her if you think it will please her to hear you speak to her *own* son as you allow yourself to do. She has no misconduct to accuse me of——"

Mamma wept and shook her head. "Never," she was beginning, but Hampden roughly interposed.

"But it *is* misconduct. And heinous misconduct too. There is no excuse for it."

"I offer you no *excuse*. If the Warden should treat me as you venture to do, I will give him no explanation either. I shall be surprised if he does. I believe he will be angry——"

"And very rightly!"

"But in his anger he will behave properly." (Lord Monksbridge jumped with indignation, and if he had jumped to the moon, and stayed there, I should only have been sorry for the man in the moon.) "And any questions he may put to me as to the causes of my change I will answer as well as I can. He has been a kind master, and I shall be sorry to displease him."

"You will do more than displease—you will disgrace him. To the Warden of Abbot's School it will be a deep disgrace that one of his pupils should prove renegade to the religion of that school."

For the first time Perkin smiled, and he had the most sweet and charming smile that I ever knew.

"The School," he said simply, "existed many centuries before Dr. FitzSimon became its Warden. It was founded for Catholics, and we are bragging of our Founder eternally; he was first an Abbot and then a Cardinal, and always a Catholic—it can hardly disgrace him or his school that one of his boys should turn to his own faith. They told me history was where I could probably do best; and I studied it, and first of all the history of our School itself and of its Founder, of what he founded it for, of what he willed to have taught in it—which was first and foremost the religion he held dear above everything else, the Catholic faith; and, the more I studied what that faith was, the more I loved it and our great Founder, the more true I found his belief, the more outrageous and false and mean, and baseless the charges made against it. By becoming a Catholic I know I must leave my school (a dear school to me now: though I did not want to go there when Sylvia first took the idea into her head)——"

And here Hampden looked but grimly at Sylvia, and she, for the first time in her life, repented of one of her own successes.

"I know I must leave it, because there is no place in it for any one who has come to believe what its Founder believed, and founded to have taught there. I have earned his benefits and must relinquish them, because I am of his faith; on his money I could go to a University, but I must not, because I earnestly hold all that he laid down should be expounded in certain theses by the winner of his munificent scholarships. I know this must be so, but I am not willing to let you say that I disgrace the Cardinal's Red Gown in joining the Cardinal's Church."

"No one," I said loudly, "who knows you would ever think you could disgrace yourself or anybody."

Lord Monksbridge was very angry. Was I, Lord Inverchlory's choice, going to turn Catholic too?

"Marjory!" he said, "you have wisely kept silence till now; it is a pity you have broken it. Your brother *is* disgracing himself—and all of us. As you yourself may feel."

"I have been silent," I cried, "far too long. If I said nothing, it was because I saw that my brother could very well answer anything you might say to him. He is only a boy, and you are a man; if I were a man I should be ashamed to hector and scold a boy; but, loud as you scold, he has had the best of it."

"Marjory," Sylvia said impatiently, "you had better hold your tongue. Why should *you* interfere when *I* don't? Why should you put yourself forward?"

"It is Hampden who is interfering, and I am free to tell him so, though you, perhaps, are not."

I believe that Sylvia herself thought him interfering, but she said—

"Some one must speak: Perkin *is* misbehaving, and he must be told of it; there is no other man to do it, and it is more a man's work."

"It is not my idea of a man's work to browbeat a boy," I repeated fiercely; "and I cannot see that Perkin is bound to submit. If Hampden tried to interfere in *my* affairs I would tell him that they did not concern him in the least, and I do not see that Perkin's affairs concern him either."

"You allow yourself," said Lord Monksbridge, in a sort of cold white heat, "to speak improperly. You and your brother are always confederates. No doubt *you* have known for months the disgrace he was plotting for us all."

"That is not true. But, Hampden, I will not let you speak of disgrace and my brother together. You cannot insult him without insulting his mother and sisters."

"I think," said Hampden, obstinately, "*any* family disgraced one of whose members turns Catholic."

Mamma moaned, and could only shake her head again in piteous protest. Perkin stood quite still and kept silent. Lady Monksbridge made uneasy rustlings in her crêpe. Sylvia bit her lip, and the flush on her neck spread upwards: her lover had not sense enough to see that he was making her also angry.

"And how," he asked Perkin, abruptly, "do you propose to live? Your future was assured: in sacrificing all the singular advantages of your present position (of which sacrifice you talk so magnanimously), how do you propose to live? You were provided for; do you intend to hang upon your mother's small means? You may be certain that *I* shall do nothing for you."

Mamma sat up straight in her chair and stared at him. His mother gasped.

"Oh! 'Ampden!" she cried out, and her face expressed a simple horror. *His* face reddened chiefly at the sound of her solecism in pronunciation: he could hardly remember having ever heard her drop an "h." For my part I had always been sure she was a lady, though in his heart the son, who really loved her, thought her vulgar; and neither Eton nor Christ Church had made him, who looked distinguished among very fine folks, a gentleman. And, clever as he was held to be, he was stupid too; he had not the least idea that Sylvia herself would ruthlessly punish him.

"You do not," she said, looking at him with unimpassioned disapproval, "understand us. I thought it right to let you speak to him" (glancing at Perkin) "because you are a man, and should know best what to say. I told Marjory she was wrong to interrupt. But you give them both the advantage, because you speak wrongly to them. We are all Auberons, and you do not understand us. We are not accustomed to hear the word 'disgrace' attached to our name. And when you talk of one of us expecting you to '*do anything for him*' you show that you quite misunderstand the situation. Perkin, with his Roman Catholic nonsense, is behaving like a fool. You had a right to say he is misbehaving; but if you imagine that my marriage with you was supposed by him, or by *any one of us,* to 'do anything' for any single member of my family, you show that you have altogether misunderstood the state of things."

She paused, intentionally I think, for a moment, and I knew that Perkin was looking down, like me, abashed, and much more troubled by her speech than by anything Hampden had said—troubled, not by her calling him a fool, but by the smooth hardness with which she punished her betrothed.

It is useless to repeat that I never could and never should understand Sylvia or pretend to foresee what she would do or say next. Utterly worldly I knew her to be, full of schemes and plans, with as little conscience as any thoroughly respectable young woman could be, and yet with a peculiar standard of her own, of which the man who loved her had no discernment. Pride was her conscience, and it did not forbid her making worldly plans, but it was up in arms when her plans were misunderstood.

"For any *one* of my family," she went on, after her pause, which was as ruthless and calculated as anything she said. "Did you suppose that my brother would count himself a penny the richer for having you for his sister's husband? That Marjory would? That Mamma ever imagined that her resources would be affected by the marriage of either of her daughters?

Their position was theirs before our engagement, and is the same still. *It is yours that has changed.*"

I felt my face turn crimson, and I could *hear* Perkin's movement of extreme misery: but Sylvia was not miserable at all. Hampden was horribly in love, and she could never be in love; half-measures she never approved, and circumstances had brought into her pitiless, exquisitely pretty hand a weapon she was determined to use, once and for all, effectually—else all her future position might suffer.

"It is yours that has changed," she said, quite placidly. "When you said that to my brother about hanging on to you I saw you mistook the position. I am not defending *him,* he is utterly senseless; but I will not let you mistake the nature of your connection with the Auberons. Our engagement has not altered the condition of the Auberons in the least——"

It was Perkin who interrupted, as if she had hit him across the face with a whip.

"For God's sake, Sylvia," he cried out, "stop! It is ghastly."

But Hampden was not in love with *him,* only with Sylvia, and it was at him that he darted a poisonous look, because he had been the innocent occasion of this.

"I am not," said Sylvia, "talking to you, Perkin. You are misbehaving. But I will not sanction mistakes."

I hoped she had done, Heaven knows she had said enough; surely this wretched man must see that she would not have said what I have written down had she loved him in the least. He did see it, but he was mean enough to want to marry her without her loving him, and she knew it perfectly. And she fully intended to be his wife, but she would not have him mistake her.

"Surely," she said, looking fully at him (*I* could not bear to, nor could Perkin), "surely you have not been thinking I was going to marry you for your wealth, or for your title!"

If she had utterly despised money and rank, she could not have alluded to his wealth and title with a colder contempt. And yet she was not acting, in fact she never could have acted well, if acting means the speaking in a character which is not one's own, but assumed; the only part she could ever play was her own, for no other interested her.

He tried to protest, but I could see, and Perkin, I knew, must see, that he had in fact supposed that it was for his money and title she was willing to be his wife. It made her angry; not that she was outraged by the assumption of *love* having had nothing to do with it; that was the terrible part of it—of love for him she never thought for a moment, and she as plainly took it for granted that he had never dreamed of her being in love with him—it made her angry because he had not, or pretended that he had not, understood her real plans and purposes.

Perkin, I am certain, was truly sorry for him, and so, in a way, was I. More by instinct than by looking at him, I felt how he must be looking, and yet I despised him in his misery, because he was mean enough to want as much as ever to marry her; and, besides, he had been prompt to browbeat Perkin, defenceless and a boy, but when Sylvia turned upon him he was not so manly as Perkin had been. Of her I tried not to think at all; I could not think of her without being ashamed of her. I had known well, at Severn Court, that Hermione, in all she had said, had really meant that Sylvia was not a lady—that was why I had been angry, and had, for the moment, hated Hermione. I knew now that if I let myself *think* of Sylvia, the horrible question would ask itself, against my will, in my mind, *was* she a lady? But, instead of thinking, I had to listen to her, and she had not, even yet, quite finished. Before she married him she chose that he should understand, if he pretended not to understand, she would make him abandon that pretence.

"Your wealth and title!" she exclaimed, lifting one eyebrow, instead of shrugging her shoulders, "I will tell you what I thought of them——"

"Sylvia!" Perkin cried out, in a sort of agony, "Sylvia, it is *hideous.* Stop! I can't stand it."

"Then you'd better go away," she answered coolly; and he went; but she said what she intended, while he went, and after he had fled.

"I will tell you what I thought of them," she repeated, smiling on her lover; and it was characteristic of her that she did not cite me as a witness, relying as she did so completely on herself. "From the moment I first met you, *before* I had met you, the Monksbridge money seemed to me a vulgarity, and the Monksbridge title an absurdity."

Mamma burst out crying openly, and Lady Monksbridge sat trembling in her chair, but Sylvia did not interrupt herself.

"You may judge," she went on, serenely, "how far they attracted me! You soon showed that you would wish to marry me, and I was not surprised when you asked me: I agreed, for I had thought of it all, and I knew you needed some one to help you. You are ambitious, and you are not content to go on in the position you inherit. But ambition is not knowledge: without help you would go on trying in vain. With my help it would not be in vain. I determined to show you it was so, and I *have* shown you. You have seen me in different surroundings from these, and you know very well that the position you saw me hold there was my *own* position; it was Miss Auberon you saw there; the consideration you saw me held in was given to *me,* to Sylvia Auberon, not to your wife—I am not your wife even now. If I were never to marry you at all, it would not take anything away from my position: but it might reduce yours to what I found it. It is not now what I found it. You know that very well: and you know that it was I who changed it. You are only a man; could *you* go knocking at the doors of great houses asking to be let in? I could let you in: and I did. And, that I might do it, I would not marry you out of hand. As your wife, I could not have helped you as Miss Auberon could, as she did—Miss Auberon with no title and no money. Now I think you must understand. If I marry you, your wealth will be all yours. I can bring nothing to it, and can claim no share of it. Your title will be yours too, and I shall be called by it, though no one will forget that I was Sylvia Auberon, and am only Lady Monksbridge by marriage. But with me as your wife, neither your money nor your title will make anybody laugh."

Perhaps the reader, if ever there is one, will conclude that Sylvia never *would* be Lady Monksbridge; nor would she have been, I think, if the second Lord

Monksbridge had been worth his father's little finger. But, then, he wasn't; and the next Lord and Lady Monksbridge were Hampden and Sylvia, a most respectable couple, admitted everywhere, a good deal sought after, of political and social importance, never greatly liked, but never quite disliked, blameless in conduct, and of most admired decorum; the Marchioness (she died one), to all seeming, the most submissive of wives, her lord neither tyrannical nor hen-pecked. Her beauty never failed or flagged, time could write no wrinkles on her brow, for wrinkles mostly mean something; and in his heart her husband (though the subject was never again mentioned between them) knew perfectly that all his great success was owing to the former Miss Auberon's fixed resolve to take him and his own false position in hand.

The world can, I think, be bought, if you are willing to pay its price, which is your own self.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

When Perkin fled from the sound of his sister's voice he was not in a very fit state for another battle on his own account; but he had to face one. He had hardly got back to college before the Warden sent for him, and with urbane smiles informed him that the Bishop of Lowminster was coming to the school, and that an address of welcome would be presented to his lordship, which address he had decided should be read by Auberon himself.

"Stephenson," he remarked, "is Captain of the school, but Stephenson has the mumps, and is on the sick-list. It will therefore fall to you to perform this honourable duty, for, though Hawkins is next in seniority to Stephenson, his unfortunate stammer renders him unfit."

"Sir," Perkin suggested, with due deference, "I don't think Hawkins would stammer when he only has to *read* something—it is when he is talking that he stutters."

"I could not trust him. He often stammers frightfully in calling the roll. An address badly read is worse than nothing." (The Warden had composed the address himself, and was determined it should not be spoiled.) "It is my wish that you should read it: I mentioned it to the Second Master, and he quite agrees with me."

Then Perkin told his lamentable story.

The Warden was by no means an ill-tempered man, and he fancied he was fond of Auberon; the truth being that he was proud of him, and confident of his achieving academic honours at Oxford, which would reflect lustre on the school and its head; but he listened with a horror that was deeply tinged with disgust. He was himself what people called a Broad Churchman, which meant, in his case at all events, that he was neither High nor Evangelical. Evangelicalism he mildly condemned as "enthusiasm," and such people as John Wesley, he thought, had never had any business in the English Church; but neither did he think that Puseyites had any business there. The whole Puseyite movement he disliked extremely as an attempt to discredit the comfortable Erastianism of the Church of England, and to revert to an ecclesiasticism of which it had been freed by the Reformation. He did not believe in the least in sacraments (though he would have thought any man disreputable who refused to have his children baptized), and considered the occasional reception of the Lord's Supper a sign of conformity incumbent on all the clergy, and particularly creditable in those of the laity who observed the practice; but he was well aware that many Cabinet Ministers and other distinguished persons never did observe that practice, and was not disposed to think them on that account less satisfactory members of the Established Church. He naturally remembered his own ordination, first as deacon, then as priest, but he did not consider himself a priest, except in the sense that he was perfectly eligible to become a bishop —which the Rev. Josiah Bibble, of the too adjacent Wesleyan Chapel, of course, was not. He was also aware that at present he could not confirm the boys in his own school, nor ordain young men who aspired to the clerical office; only bishops could do so; but he did not imagine that, if he should be selected to fill any vacant see, and receive the necessary consecration, any new spiritual powers would have accrued to him; he would merely be authorized to perform certain ceremonies, which he had now no authority to perform.

He had for Dissenters no *odium theologicum,* though he looked down upon them as under-educated persons, mostly of the lower middle-classes; nor did he really believe that they lacked any spiritual privileges that would have been theirs had they belonged, like himself, to a regular Church, with bishops and priests and two sacraments. All the same, he had a warm admiration for the Established Church because it *was* established, and was, he felt, an integral part of England, which he was conscious was in every way superior to all other countries. The Church of England, he knew, had been made by England herself for her own use (and he thoroughly approved of the use of home manufactures; though, being free from bigotry of any sort, he would not insist that his own port wine should be grown in these islands); and he almost loved her, because she completely fulfilled the purposes for which she had been made. No nation, he was sure, could long exist without religion. France had tried, and had failed so completely as to have been forced to fall back, *faute de mieux,* on the religion she had so noisily declared outlaw and defunct. England could never exist without religion, but she had known precisely what religion, and how much of it, she wanted, and the Established Church was the calm result. The genius of England, he felt, was practical (*i.e.* unsupernatural), and the religion that would serve her turn must be practical, *i.e.* respectable, unsupernatural, and what eccentric persons might call Erastian, that is to say, a State Department, like the Foreign Office, or the Treasury. A State Department has high sanction and authority, and is unlikely to fall, or remain, a prey to faddists. And in England there could only be one real Church, in Dr. FitzSimon's idea of a Church. That was why he despised Nonconformists; for Scottish Presbyterians he had quite a different feeling, corresponding to their different position. Some English Dissenters might teach precisely what the Kirk of Scotland teaches, but in England they were mere sectaries, heterogeneous to the State. North of the Tweed, that teaching was not alien, but suited to the natives of a subordinate portion of Her Majesty's realm that had for centuries liked its own meagre, chill, and ill-furnished conception of Christianity. The Warden did not despise Scotch Presbyterianism, he merely congratulated himself on being a South Briton. As for Catholicity, he had never considered it with any polemic fury; it was outside his mark. Being English, he was not inclined to waste himself in irritation against foreign customs. They were inferior, and there was an end of it. He had travelled for a few weeks, on his marriage, and had been convinced that the languages of the Continent were but awkward mediums for the expression of British needs and wishes, and that foreign meals, foreign beds, and foreign amusements were odd and unsatisfactory. Catholicity might suit nations that breakfasted at noon, and had no real breakfast at all, that needed only one other meal that was neither dinner nor supper, and was followed by no temperately protracted discussion of port wine. Catholicism was apparently a part of the inscrutable, but not objectionable, decree of Providence that made the Continent continental and inferior, that left England splendidly insular and Protestant.

Of course, the Warden was old-fashioned. He was not Broad in the later sense. He did not consider that it was the duty of a "Broad" ecclesiastic to preach and print himself in venomous sneers against Christianity. England was Christian, and therefore Christianity, far from being ridiculous and effete, was very becoming in all respectable Englishmen. To preach on Easter Sunday against the Resurrection of Christ he would have thought indecent: in fact, his tone of mind was far from being irreverent or destructive. All that called for destruction had been destroyed, for good and all, at the Reformation. He was very far from being irreligiously minded. Religion, he was certain, was a *sine quâ non* in a reasonable, permanent State, and he had a decent consciousness that a State's religion must be expressed in the speech and life of its ministers—its ordained ministers: as to the other sort of Ministers it behoved them to live decently too, and to speak with accordant decency. The Warden would not refuse to help them with his vote, or to be helped by them in turn, though he understood that their lives were privately scandalous, and that they were, in fact, unbelievers.

And now a boy, and a boy in his own school, must, forsooth, announce to him, the Warden, his decision to leave the Church of England and enroll himself under the alien banner of Rome. He was not an ill-tempered man, but his temper was sorely tried.

"A Roman Catholic!" he cried, with extreme disgust. "Become a Roman Catholic! *Become* one! One of Abbot's Scholars—a Cardinal's Exhibitioner and Scholar—*become* one!"

How, urged Perkin, with a meekness very different from the rather proud independence he had shown of Lord Monksbridge's opinion,—how, he pleaded, could he be a Catholic except by becoming one, and how could he go on calling himself a Protestant when in faith and conviction he was a Catholic?

"Become a Catholic!" cried the Warden again. "Good gracious! *Become* one! There are people who were born so—for the accident of birth they are not responsible; Norfolk Howards and such like: but to *become* one; it is preposterous."

He spoke of the unlucky victims of heredity who had been born Catholic as he might have spoken of families born with hare-lips—would any sane man ever slit his own upper lip on purpose?

"Why should you 'call yourself a Protestant'? Why should you call yourself anything? At your age it is not *expected* you should call yourself anything—it is enough you should *be* a Protestant," he protested, rubbing a sleek white hand through his hair as if the irritation were there.

"But, sir, I'm *not* a Protestant. I don't believe in it. I am a Catholic——"

"You mean you have been . . . been initiated, already! When? Where? How? Good gracious!"

"No, sir. I meant that I am a Catholic by belief.

I have not been received into the Catholic Church, or even instructed, yet."

"'By belief!' 'Belief' indeed. Really, Auberon, I'm ashamed of you. Had you been properly occupied with your studies you would not have had leisure for such irrelevant considerations; you would have believed what others of your age and in your position are content to believe—what their responsible guardians and superiors believe. Do you suppose my sons are considering and debating what it is they should believe or disbelieve?"

Perkin was far from supposing that any of the Warden's sons had ever devoted an hour of any day of his life to any "consideration or debate" concerning religion; but he did not say so.

"No," cried their father, accepting Perkin's submissive silence as sufficient disclaimer. "Of course not. They are healthy, normal lads."

No one could look healthier than Perkin; he only failed to be normal in that his active and alert mind, set on certain studies by his superiors themselves, had found there food for considerations of absorbing interest and, as he thought, importance. He was only abnormal in that sort of almost passionate consistency and devotion to truth of which I have spoken before.

"I never thought," said the Warden, regarding his pupil with reproachful disappointment, "that you were morbid."

Poor Perkin! With all his vigorous youth, his look of exuberant health and spirits, his tall and sinewy athletic form,—certainly the Warden might be excused for having failed to think of him as a morbid boy.

"I have always understood," the Doctor declared, "that you were a merry lad; you shared, as it was reported to me, with wholesome zest and capacity in the sports and games—the *legitimate* relaxations from graver duties. Such vagrant considerations as you now hint at, debatings as to belief (a boy's belief! the theological speculations of a lad!) are *not* legitimate relaxations from the studies which constitute the business and duty of your present period of existence; but illicit dissipations, stolen wanderings, most lamentable aberrations. *Most* lamentable: most deplorable. Perhaps I err in speaking with this reasoned calmness," cried the fuming Warden. "It might well appear to be rather my duty, as it is my right, to adopt a tone of heavier, more magisterial displeasure."

And he whisked about upon his own axis till his back was turned to Perkin, and his face was to the chimney-piece—adorned with two busts, one of the great Gibbon, and one of Minerva.

Minerva, indeed, never turned Catholic, and her effigy suggested no argument specially appropriate—except that irrefragable one that, if young Auberon had attended exclusively, as he ought, to the heathen classics, he would not have debauched his mind by these puerile questions of Christian ecclesiasticism. But Gibbon's fat face did suggest something.

"Auberon," said the Doctor, soothed by that suggestion, and by the sense that he had himself spoken well, and to the point, "I blame myself for the condescension of my tone, but I *will* condescend. From me to you, a more crushing rejoinder might be fitter to our respective positions—so far as you can be said to *have* any position: nevertheless I will waive my position," and he waved a ruler, as typical of it. "I am willing to hope that this may prove a *temporary* aberration."

Perkin quietly shook his head, but the Warden for the moment was really thinking more of Gibbon than of him, and went on almost without noticing it.

"That Great Man," and he pointed the ruler at the tip of the Historian's little snub nose, "that Sublime Genius was once a Boy."

Perkin glanced in the direction indicated and seemed to doubt it.

"A Boy, no doubt, of Exceptional Brilliance; but a Boy—and subject to the infirmities of his time of life."

Perkin knew quite as much about Gibbon as the Doctor, and fancied that the infirmities belonged to a later stage than boyhood, and very unpleasant they must have been.

"As a Boy," cried the Warden, pretty cheerfully, "Gibbon—ay, Gibbon—fell a victim to the lures and wiles of the Harlot of the Seven Hills."

A truly decorous man in ordinary social conversation, the Doctor had no difficulty in speaking of harlots to his young pupil—with whom, indeed, he had translated Juvenal without turning a hair.

"But," he went on, with rising hope, "it was but a youthful slip: inexplicable——"

"I never," said Perkin, "could understand how on earth he came to do it."

"There is no need for you to understand. It was, as I observed, inexplicable."

"Yes, it was," Perkin agreed; "he never had any more sense of religion than a tom cat."

"Auberon! (My tolerance leads you to forget yourself.) But Gibbon's lapse was brief; he soon discarded the effeminate shackles of Rome——"

("If ever," thought Perkin, "there was an old woman, Gibbon was his name.")

"Of Rome. And he lived to be her doughtiest assailant."

"Yes, sir. I know he lived to sneer at Christianity——"

"Auberon!"

And the Doctor was not only offended, but sincerely scandalized; the *Decline and Fall* was the only History of the Church he had ever read, and he thought very little of the Church, but he thought heaven and earth of Gibbon; Gibbon understood what a Church should be, and how *the* Church had failed to be at all like Gibbon's neat ideal of it. Of orthodoxy and heresies Gibbon had had a sane and just estimate—leather and prunella.

"Auberon!" cried the Warden. "I was hoping that you might in part follow that Great Man's example—or take warning by what happened in his case, and avoid his temporary lapse. I fear you are not at all like Gibbon."

"I am sure I am not. He had not written his History when he became a Catholic; I have read it, and I am certain that I shall become a Catholic, and by God's grace remain one. Sir, I do most truly thank you for all your kindness to me: you have always been kind, and to-day, too, when you might have been very different. I did not think you would be harsh, but you might have been, and I do most deeply feel how far from harshly you have treated me. I am only a boy, and you could easily snub and scold me down, and you have not tried to do either. Above all, I thank you for not sneering at me. I know that I am doing what you must think wrong, though I know that in me it would be horribly wrong not to do it: for me there would be no excuse if I held back. Sir, I know it would not be right for a boy like me to talk to you, my dear, kind Master and Warden, of God, and of prayer, but I am certain that God will not be angry with me for doing what I hear Him telling me to do, and I have prayed and prayed to be led, and no other way has been shown to me. You will, I dare say, always be sorry that I have done this thing, but I do not believe you will ever be sorry for having listened to me so patiently and kindly. I have been very happy here, and I love this place, and every one in it; but I cannot stay in it, and you cannot let me stay. As soon as I had told my own people I came to tell you (with a very heavy heart); and now, I am sure you will say that I ought to go home and come back no more; I cannot make a secret of what I am going to do, and it would not be right to tell the other boys while I am one of them. I must go home; and then I cannot help their knowing; they will hear, and they will think me, no doubt, as you do, sir, a silly fellow. I can't help that, and it doesn't matter. But I should know myself to be a mean and dishonest boy if I stayed here and pretended to believe what every one who shares in the advantages of this place has now to believe."

There came a knock at the door, and the Doctor, half ruefully, half with relief, called out, "Come in!" and the second master entered.

"Good-bye, sir," said Perkin.

"Good-bye, Auberon," said the Warden. "God bless you."

The door closed, and Auberon was gone; they heard his light footfall as he went downstairs, and something in the solemnity of the Warden's farewell made the second master say, "No better boy in all the school; no cleverer, nor simpler, nor merrier, nor cleaner-lived."

The Warden was worldly, but he had a heart, and it was an honest one; with the echo of the lad's words still ringing in it, he would not detract from his character or decry it. But he was not ready to speak, and only nodded gravely. He moved to the great oriel window and looked down into "Founder's Quad," and the second master came and stood beside him.

It was raining a little, but a watery gleam of sunlight shone down between two rags of cloud, and lighted the bare head of the Cardinal's Scholar who was crossing the paved yard—no boy walked covered through Founder's Quad. Opposite was Founder's Tower with its arch, leading to Chapel Quad, over which, in a triple niche, was still Our Lady's image, weather-worn by the rains of nearly five centuries, with St. Peter's, to whom the college was dedicated, on her right, and on her left the kneeling effigy of the Cardinal Founder, looking up at her and the Divine Baby in her arms. The boy looked up too, and the two elderly men saw him bow his head in farewell greeting. Because he held her for God's Mother, and trusted to her prayers for him; because he did believe that Christ had given those keys to Peter, and that Peter's successor held them still; because he thought of Christ's Church and her Sacraments and her teaching as that Founder, himself one of her princes, had done; because he had learned exactly what the Cardinal had founded his school to teach—he had to go out thence and never come back, and must strip off the red gown he wore in token of being one of the Cardinal's pupils. The two masters watched him pass out of sight under the arch, and the Warden, turning from the window whence Founder's Tower and the Founder's image could be seen, towards Gibbon and Minerva, said, shaking his head half regretfully and half irritably—

"He has gone. He leaves us. His exhibitions and scholarships are vacant. He goes to join the Church of Rome."

The Warden spoke almost as though that church were waiting round the corner (in a cab, for instance) to drive the Cardinal's Exhibitioner away. But the second master was too thoroughly excited to notice the mere form of the announcement.

"Auberon! Turn Catholic! Good Heavens! You don't mean it! *Good* Heavens! I never thought him such a fool."

Such is the perversity of our human nature, the Doctor was irritated at this bald expression of what was his own opinion, and showed it in his manner. With an exclamation of impatience he turned to Gibbon, and adjusted the great man's bust—which was slewed a little too much to the left, as if Miss Curchod's lover were ogling the austere Minerva.

CHAPTER XXXIX

Auberon passed under the arch of Founder's Tower, and, crossing the quadrangle, ran up the semi-lunar flight of shallow stone steps, under another arch, low-browed and much worn with time and weather, into the fore-porch of the chapel. Opposite the door into the chapel itself was another niche in which another image of the Blessed Virgin had once stood, and under it was a sort of little stone cupboard, for a lamp to be kept burning in her honour. At that precise moment it held only a Greek grammar, for which Hawkins mi (its careless and forgetful owner) was searching in vain up and down his class-room.

Auberon pushed open the chapel door and went in. A rainy gleam of sunlight was streaming through one of the windows not filled with stained glass, though in the middle of one of its panels were the Cardinal's arms, surmounted by his red hat and surrounded by its strings and tassels.

The chapel was, as the boy knew it would be, empty: and he stood, for a moment, looking round and taking it all in for the last time. On each side of the door were the old recessed stoups for holy water, and he dipped his hand in one, as though it were not empty, and crossed himself—how long was it since any boy had done the same thing there? *Some one* must have done it for the last time, and for his soul Perkin put up a little prayer. Over the entrance was another window, in which was shown the Commission of the Keys to Peter, for the chapel, like the college, had been dedicated in honour of Christ's Mother and His Vicar. Behind the altar was a carved stone reredos, representing the Annunciation: the ancient altar itself had been removed in compliance with Edward VI.'s order that all altars should be destroyed, and a somewhat mean and meagre wooden table replaced it, and stood there still. The ancient piscina for the Mass, with a credence-shelf over it, was also still to be seen, in the wall to the right, and, opposite, was an aumbry for the holy oils, its oaken doors still intact, and, inside, the college-porter's wife kept a little brush and dust-pan, of rather special quality, that she used for cleaning the stalls.

Auberon stood near the door for a minute or two, and then knelt down in one of the lower boys' benches: his own stall, as Cardinal's scholar, was up near the altar, but he felt he had resigned his scholarships and had no right to it. He hardly prayed, he was only saying good-bye; but he must say it on his knees.

It seemed to him much longer than it really was since he had first come here: even of his short life but a small proportion had been spent in this place; but it seemed as though all his life that mattered much had been crowded into the time during which he had belonged to Abbot's School. And everything in the school, and everybody in it, had suddenly acquired a sort of poignant interest that was almost sacred. He had always been alert to notice anything queer, and nothing odd or comic at Abbot's had ever escaped him; even now he half smiled to think of some of the boys, and some of the masters, of the pompous, good-natured, and obsequious college porter, utterly h-less where h's should be, but lavishly putting h's where none were demanded by law or custom; and, half smiling, he felt a rueful twinge of compunction, such as one might feel beside the odd, unshaped form of one well known on whom has fallen for ever the Great Silence.

He would not have been my brother Perkin had he felt any hardness towards any one. For what he was losing he blamed no one, not even Fate the much-abused: in stripping himself of all he had gained by honest work, of the independent position he had earned so young, he felt no grudging anger against inexorable necessity. He had nothing left in all the world but himself—and something greater than himself: he was making himself a penniless, dependent boy, but he accepted his utter poverty (he who so liked to spend) and dependence (to whom dependence was so irksome) as simply as any grown gentleman has ever accepted ruin, to whom ruin has come suddenly, and said, "You and I are decreed to one another."

He had given himself to our Lord, as he saw Him, and the little gift had been accepted and kept; it was not flouted, as of mean and silly account, and flung back. He never got back exactly what he had given, only something greater in its place. God never gives us back our wretched selves, unless we grudge and snatch the gift back, and insist on that miserable restitution. He gives Himself instead. So Perkin, clutching at no such restoration of what he had lost, never became quite the old Perkin; and the blemish of a certain light and careless selfishness, that had once been in him, withered up in the wonderful great fire to which he had committed himself.

The only thing of his own that he made any count of was his conscience, because it did not belong to him, and he durst not play the fool with it. Of his own loss he thought (that rainy, sunny afternoon of gusty light and petulant, laughing tears) only as it meant the parting with what no boy, unlike him, would have thought of at all. No one in all Abbot's School had one pang of regret for him like the pang he felt at losing them. The playing-fields, the school quadrangles (where so much of the school-life, for five centuries, had been lived), every common, trivial feature of the place, and of the life, shone to him, in that last light of farewell, sacred and poignantly remote, part of himself and gone from himself for ever and ever. And even here, too, he thought not of himself alone, egotistically; it all seemed to him a great, wonderful river of undying youth, flowing onward through the flat centuries, sunlit, with a sun that never touches man's jostling success, to some vast undiscovered country; of himself he thought only as a drop in it, infinitely trivial in comparison of that ever-living, never-ceasing whole. The walls of the chapel seemed like the banks of that ever-moving stream of youth, endlessly flowing through them, never held or kept back by them, themselves changing but little by time's slow erosion.

He was hardly praying now: only taking a farewell so reverent that its bowing down of spirit and heart was in truth a prayer—of love, and patience, and thanksgiving, and submission; but he had often prayed here: it was here that he had, perhaps, learned to pray.

It was growing dusk now, and he must be going;

it was hard to go, and leave behind him here, as he felt he would, his merry boyhood. The careless days of play, and of work almost as pleasant and easy as play, must give place to a man's heavier work. He had his bread to earn, and could no longer expect to be able to pick and choose the way of it. Almost from the beginning of his coming to this place he had cost his mother nothing, and certainly he must cost her nothing henceforward. He was old enough to earn a livelihood, and he must do it, in whatever fashion he should find possible; and he knew it might have to be in some manner irksome enough. He did not shrink from that, or from the idea of dull, meagrely remunerated, toil: but he stood at the threshold of manhood with all his boyhood torn away, and made suddenly as distant, as irrevocably part of the past, as though it were actually thrust behind him by the vague, slow lapse of years.

Around the chapel walls, under the windows, ran a scripture, carved in stone letters; it was too dark to read it now, but he knew it was there, and it preached to him, giving him a motto for his life:—

EXSPECTA : DOMINVM : VIRILITER : AGE ·
ET : CONFORTETVR · COR : TVVM ·
ET : SVSTINE : DOMINVM.

He was just beginning really to pray at last—for his mother and his sisters—when the chapel door was pushed open, and some one came in with a light, hurried step, uncertain and troubled; and he knew that some one else had knelt down, hastily, just inside the door, and he could hear a panting whisper, as if the new-comer were praying unaware of any other human presence. So he rose to go away; and, dim as the place was grown, he recognized, when close to him, who it was that had interrupted him; a young boy whom he scarcely knew, but whose face he knew well, an almost childish face, innocent and not wise, as though the innocence were half silly, and the silliness but a part of its innocence. He was not kneeling up, but, rather, crouching on the floor, and the attitude expressed such pain and trouble that Auberon could not pass by on the other side.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked gently, pausing and bending down.

"Oh yes!" the child answered miserably; "that's why I came here. I couldn't think of anything else to do. I'm so horribly afraid."

And all his body shook with gasping sighs that were like dry sobs.

"What is it? Tell me. Can I help you?"

His grave, whispering voice sounded so kind in that quiet place, that the child, half desperate, took heart to blurt out an answer under the covering dusk.

"I'm in a frightful trouble. Something has been found out. A fearful thing. K—— knows. He suspected, and spied, and found out. He will tell, I'm sure he'll tell. And if he does it will be expelling. My mother—it will kill her. All day (since I knew that K—— knew) I have been nearly mad with horror and fright, and just now it came into my head to come here; but I can't pray, I can't think, I can't do anything. . . . Oh, Auberon! everybody thinks such a lot of you; K—— does. You . . . could you . . .

would you speak to him? He would listen to you—only not to be expelled—in two weeks it is the holidays, and I would promise not to come back; I would make my mother not let me come back. Only not to be expelled. Auberon, you asked if you could do anything. Will you help me?"

The chapel was all one grey shadow now; but to the big boy who was leaving it for ever it seemed to be filled with eastern light, and it held more than him and the gasping, agonized child; the writing Christ was there, stooping to His writing on the ground, the only writing He ever did on earth; a cowering figure was near Him, waiting for His first condemnation who *was* without sin. Only He would not; but wrote, for the clean-eyed angels to read, His decree of pardon and sweet hope.

To Him first, and not to the child, the lad spoke; he prayed now, without any show of it, his heart only kneeling, and his lips making no sound.

"Give me this child instead of myself," he asked. "Let me promise for You, and keep my word. *I* am being expelled from this place. Let that be enough. Give me leave, Christ Jesus, to promise for You."

What leave could he expect? Could he look for any voice from heaven?

It did not come from heaven, but from low down on the earth.

"Promise!" wailed the cowering child at his feet.

And, because he knew Him, already, to Whom he had spoken, he took it for leave to answer.

"I promise," he said gently.

Then the child wept, in gusts and sobs of tears. At first he could not speak.

"And you will speak for me to K——?" he gasped, at last. "Oh, Auberon, how kind you are! He will attend to you, you will speak to him?"

To Perkin it seemed like a temptation. Should he interfere? Should he speak? Or should he *believe,* and not thrust himself in at all? Is God so far away that He can, in these stale days of little faith, be trusted to do nothing any longer by Himself?

"Oh, Auberon! You promised," pleaded the child.

"I do promise. No harm shall happen to you."

With a tearing sigh of relief the child thanked him again.

"No. No harm will happen if you speak for me."

"I have spoken. No harm will happen to you."

"Spoken? spoken already? Did you know before I told you? Had K—— told you?"

"No. I knew nothing. It was to Him—Himself—I spoke; and I promise—for Him—that no harm shall happen to you. Can you not believe? When you came here you knew what you were coming for—Who it was you were going to ask——"

"Yes," the poor child pleaded, "because there was nothing else to do. No one else to ask. But you were here, and it came into my head to ask you—and oh! I thought you had promised."

"I did, I do. *He* sent you here. *He* put me here to answer for Him. I do answer. He is here to know, if He would not be bound by the promise I *know* He gave me leave to make He would say so, you would hear Him; I would. Listen: I promise, for *Him,* that no harm shall happen to you."

The silence that fell when the lad ceased speaking was like the resonance of the great ocean, as children hear it in an empty shell. It tingled in their ears.

"Believe him," it whispered to the child: he wavered, trembled, clutched at the deeper-grounded hope it gave than any that mere compliance with his often-urged plea for human interference could really have given—and he did believe. He knew that there was no disavowal of the bold, strange promise. For the first time in his life the Divine, conquering blow of faith had stricken him also.

"Good-bye," Auberon whispered as simply as ever boy spoke. "It will be all right."

And he went away, out of the place where he had learned to pray, and where he would never be again. It never even occurred to him to tag on to his message of comfort the warning "Sin no more;" he was only a boy, and God's Eternal Law could gain no strength by his officious reminder of it.

And no harm did happen to the child.

CHAPTER XL

Before the next day's sun had set, all Monksbridge was agog with the portentous news that one of the boys of Abbot's School had turned Catholic. He had been, it was reported, publicly stripped of his red gown, publicly expelled, his name had been publicly erased from the College Roll, and his name (written in gilt letters in Hall, like that of all Cardinal's scholars) had been publicly painted over with black paint. Simon Plummer, the glazier and painter, had been sent for, and had daubed it over with his black paint in the presence of the whole school and all the masters, who had hissed (not Plummer, but the culprit Papist boy) " in a profound silence," which burst into " God save the Queen " by way of protest against the disloyalty of Catholics. It was reported that the Warden had publicly flogged the renegade, till, overcome by tears, he had been unable to proceed. A later version of this rumour added that the second master had then taken Dr. FitzSimon's place; in this form the story crossed the bridge and reached old Lawyer Stiff, in Llanthamy, who said—

" Tut, tut! It would be assault—a lad of eighteen can't be set upon with blows by two men for leaving the Church of England."

But then old Stiff was a Dissenter, and his incredulity was readily understood.

Mrs. Auberon was declared by half the servants in Monksbridge to have fallen into a succession of faint-ing fits, and to be lying at death's door with two doctors in constant attendance; the other half understood that she and her daughters had all been perverted by "the son," and were about to enter convents; in the case of the elder Miss Auberon this was partly attributed to disappointment, Lord Monksbridge having instantly broken his engagement.

In the bar of the Cross Keys it was said that the Duke, as Visitor of Abbot's School, was leaving for London to apply for a Royal Commission with a view to "suspending" it, till such reforms could be introduced as would purge it from the disgrace it had sustained and render impossible any such scandals in the future. It was also asserted that an action at law would lie against the renegade, who, it now appeared, had long been a Catholic and a Jesuit in disguise; that he would be sued in damages for the costs of his board, lodging and education, which he had obtained under false pretences; probably he would also be charged with conspiracy.

"Tut, tut!" said old Mr. Stiff, to whom this report also filtered. "The question is, whether *he* could not sue *them* for deprivation of the income of his scholarships—if he hadn't been weak enough to resign them of his own accord."

The Dissenters on the whole were rather pleased, and the Rev. J. Bibble only wondered that the she-wolf of Rome didn't snap up more of the ill-shepherded lambs of the Establishment; but none the less did he and they condemn the precocious depravity of young Auberon—there would be no harm in his leaving the Church of England had he left it for a Gospel religion (of which there were several in Monksbridge), but to hark back to the vomit of Rome was a sign of a fearfully depraved nature.

One very old gentleman, a retired publican, who had been ineffectually trying to drink himself to death for many years, and relieved the burden of his leisure by much reading of the newspapers, ascribed it to the French as direct emissaries of the Pope. The French, it seemed, had long been taking his instructions in Rome, under a flimsy pretext of garrisoning that Seven Hilled City (we had no hills in Monksbridge, and felt our superiority). He had recently let them go away, and no doubt had bidden them scatter themselves through Protestant countries as spies and what not. A French drill-sergeant had quite lately appeared in Monksbridge, and made a show of giving lessons in fencing and calisthenics; most likely every town in England had been similarly invaded.

"And what," asked Mr. Porter, tragically, "is to prevent them rising, throughout England, as one man, and killing of us all in our beds?"

And certainly it appeared likely that, if they rose at all, it would be as one man, seeing that there was only one of them in each of the doomed towns.

Elijah Castor, a fifth-rate grocer, who did but a meagre trade, almost entirely on long credit, was quite pensive about it throughout Monday, and spoke dismally to his customers as he weighed out tea and sugar, so absent-mindedly as not to be aware that the ounce weight lay all day under a scrap of whitey-brown paper at the bottom of that scale where no weights were supposed to be.

"'Tis a back-sliding," he observed, "and a stroke o' reprobation cuttin' very nigh oursens. Two women grindin' at the mill, one taken, and another left. It might as well be huz onst that vulture's paw is scrattin' round. Oo's to say where it'll scrat next?"

"Very true, Mr. Castor," agreed Mrs. Plugram, of the Abbot's Trusts' Almshouses, eyeing her quarter-pound of tea with a strong impression that it looked less than usual, but (conscious of a running account that might, perhaps, run longer than herself) voicing no suspicion.

"'Twould be," she said, "a crool thing for the poor, if the Pope came over universal, and raised the prices on us—nezessities o' life are dear enough a'ready."

"Nezessities! I counts tea a luggzory. There's yourn, Mrs. Plugram; and I loses on it. I loses on every quarter-pound I make up; 'tis only the quantity as shows a profit—that's well known i' the trade."

But Mrs. Plugram and Elijah Castor, and even Mr. Porter, lay in very low strata of the Monksbridge formation. In much higher layers of it young Auberon was equally, though differently, condemned.

Miss Belvoir took "his apostasy" as a reflection on her late father, who had been a Vicar, and only missed being an Archdeacon by becoming an angel at a premature and inopportune moment; the Church of England had been good enough for *him*—was it not good enough for a schoolboy of eighteen? But he was an Auberon, and there was a fund of conceit in the Auberon blood. His eldest sister, it was well known, had meant him for a bishop—but to be Archbishop of Canterbury would not satisfy *him;* there were no Cardinals in the English Church, so he went where there were (his red gown, no doubt, had put it in his head), and he most likely aimed to be Pope—Perkin I., but his real name was Peter, and he would be Peter II., and English travellers would have to kiss his toe.

Mrs. Hawthorn, the Vicar's wife, knew that Auberon had not been expelled, and deplored the circumstance.

"If *you* had been Warden, Vicar, you would have done it, or my name's not Genesta."

The Vicar, a mild man with four chins, was well aware that her name was as she stated it; she had it from her godmother (called after *her* aunt, who was an Honourable of the Grooby-Mere family, that descended in the female line from the Plantagenets).

"But, Jenny," he argued, "I couldn't. No Warden could."

"He should have been stripped of his gown—as people say he was. The report was correct in principle, tho' mistaken in fact. *Vox populo,* you know."

"*Populi,* my dear, *populi.*"

"I or Oh—I'd have stripped him. I never cared for those Auberons—after all, quite new people in Monksbridge, and full of airs; a curate's widow, and only duke's houses good enough for her and her young madams to stay at; and that brazen-haired daughter that's to marry the lord——"

"The Lord, my dear!"

"Jeremiah, don't be profane, if weanèd childs—children, I should say—*are* becoming Papists all around you. I never thought much of her looks—nor Mrs. Fitz either; I dare say it's her *bose yew,* as Mrs. Fitz would say, that account for the brother not being expelled. The Warden was inclined to make a pretty goose of himself about her when first into this parish she came."

"My dear, we'd better not be scandalous," the Vicar suggested, not intolerantly. He had no idea of Deaneries or Bishoprics himself, but rather inclined to the view that you should be content in that station in life in which it had pleased Providence to set you—with seven hundred a year, two curates, only one daughter, and a wife who had ninety-one pounds, thirteen and fourpence a year of her own, and no extravagant tastes. He was not at all jealous of the Warden, and did not dislike him in the least, but he thought him a shallow fellow (the sort that gets on, however), and had heard of his neighbour's transient appreciation of the pretty Miss Auberon with some chuckling, and without the slightest apprehension of a clerical scandal. He thought highly of the young lady's prudence, and did not think meanly of Mrs. FitzSimon's alertness and circumspection.

"Come, come," he said, "we mustn't be uncharitable; they're our very good neighbours. He's a lifelong friend; I remember his sister, a personable young woman who married a wholesale tanner in quite a big way."

"There are no tanners in my family," Mrs. Hawthorn observed loftily. "If we don't grab up lords, or take Wardens and be thankful for them, we mate with beneficed clergy, like our mothers and grandmothers before us; and if I were one——"

"A grandmother, my dear?" said the Vicar, with ill-timed jocosity.

"If I were a beneficed clergyman in a parish where a parishioner of mine, however young and jackanapesy, had gone over to Rome, I'd expel him publicly."

"But he has expelled himself. And publicly enough—all Monksbridge is talking about it. I'm sick of hearing of it. I lament it. But if it concerns anybody it concerns the Warden; why do you assail *me?*"

And the poor Vicar grew almost pathetic in his sense of female injustice.

"The boy," he added, "expelled himself. What more do you want? He just told the Doctor what he was going to do, and walked off, leaving all his scholarships behind him."

"He shouldn't have been allowed to walk off. He should have been retained for Public Expulsion. It's odd if you take his part. He has been a Catholic at heart ever so long, no doubt. A Papist in disguise——"

"Disguised like a Cardinal in a red robe!" cried the Vicar, who had been a good husband too long not to love scoring a point against the wife of his broad bosom. To tell the truth, he was bored to death by all the talk of young Auberon's shocking misbehaviour; it was now Sunday afternoon, and the news had reached Prior's House by six on Saturday evening. From that moment till she went to sleep his wife had spoken of nothing else, and she had begun again first thing in the morning.

On Sunday afternoons the Vicar was used to have his study to himself, that he might meditate—especially if, as to-day, he were to preach at the evening service. But, after receiving several visitors (rare on Sundays), Mrs. Hawthorn had invaded that sanctuary, and he much wished she would go. He was actually sitting upon the third volume of the *Last Chronicle of Barset,* and though he might not, like the Princess, have felt a single parched pea through twenty feather-beds, he was fully conscious of the book, and would like to go on with it. Being a clergyman himself, he was not in the least sensitive about Mr. Trollope's presentation of parsons; it was by the ecclesiastically-minded laity that that portraiture was held to be libellous and cynical. The clergy, he considered, were no more perfect than other people, and he resented the assumption that they *should* be perfect, much more than the clever author's representations of them. He would not even confess that Archdeacon Grantly was worldly in any objectionable degree, but thought him a fine specimen of the older type of clergyman, well-born and affluent, not haughty to his inferiors, or supercilious among his equals, without humbug and with many excellent qualities not universally found among more "Apostolic" pastors of a newer school. Of Mr. Crawley he thought very much as the Archdeacon did, pitying his great misfortunes but disliking him, and holding him for a poor creature with a bee in his bonnet. The gentle and sweet Mr. Harding he admired much less than Trollope himself evidently did, and when the old man refused the Deanery, Mr. Hawthorn was quite as impatient and irritated as Dr. Grantly.

Mrs. Hawthorn was not at all like Mrs. Proudie, but the Vicar was still less like that awful lady's husband, and he determined to have his study to himself; and he made himself understood.

"Well, I'll go," said Mrs. Hawthorn. "I see what you're going to preach: and you'll want to read it through. Shall I bring your tea in here—or"—perceiving some access of impatience in her lord—"shall I send it in?"

"Yes, my dear. Do! Let Sarah bring it in."

(It was a perpetual satisfaction to Mrs. FitzSimon that they only kept a "Sarah," while Warden's Lodge gloried in a "Willoughby"—in ginger-coloured livery.)

Mrs. Hawthorn had her eye on the sermon, an old one, and it had caught the text.

"Ah!" she observed, "'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings.' I do believe you're going to preach on it—that you're going to bring him in."

"No, I'm not. I never thought of it," her husband protested, with gathering impatience for his book. "I shouldn't think of it. But it may be as well not to preach that one at all."

"'Curse ye Meroz,' would be more seasonable, I should say," declared the lady.

"Nonsense, Jenny! Do you suppose *I'm* going to behave as if a green boy's folly were turning us all upside-down? I shall ignore it."

"Don't be angry, Jeremiah," pleaded his wife, coming back from the door and speaking with an almost tearful meekness. "*I* have never dictated or suggested, have I, now? Only I do love for you to distinguish yourself; I know you don't care to—you've no paltry ambitions, like some. You never do use the pulpit to advertise yourself. But don't be cross because I——"

"No, Nesta; no, I'm not cross," the elderly clergyman assured her good-naturedly. "I know you meant well; but really I don't think it dignified to make a public fuss about a thing like this . . . and . . . and, Nesta, if I had a lad of my own I should feel it, if he couldn't be content with the religion that his father preached, but this boy is no son of ours, and it can't cut us that way. And—and, Nesta; if one *had* a son, it would not be a bad thing, after all, if he thought enough, and cared enough, about religion, to be ready to give up all that lad is giving up. Few boys do."

"But, Jeremiah, that's as much as to say that he's sincere."

The elderly clergyman, who really longed to be reading about Mr. Trollope's worldly clergymen, whom he did not think too worldly at all, paused a moment; he had not always been elderly, and out of a far-off time shone still certain gleams of a light that had not been worldly, when sarcasm had not seemed synonymous with truth, or all enthusiasm mere folly.

"Why should we say he is not sincere?" he answered, one of those half-lost gleams lighting his grey face. "God is the judge. *I* know he is wrong: but, if *he* doesn't, his mistake is not insincerity."

Out of the pulpit and the church, alone with his wife, he hardly ever had that great Name in his mouth. His tone in his family was usually urbane, complacent, kindly, and often jocose, rarely solemn.

"Oh, Jerry," cried his wife, feeling herself, somehow, nearer to the days of their courtship, before he was ordained at all, when she was a comely lass, very proud of her lover. "Oh, Jerry, you are a good man."

And she plumped down, not lightly, on the hassock at his feet (that nearly played her false and sent her toppling over), and hugged him strenuously.

“ Oh, Jerry! how good you are! ”

“ No, Nesta, no! ” he protested, almost wishing the *Last Chronicle* were not so hard, and disliking a scene as heartily as she enjoyed it.

“ Ah, but I know better,” the stout lady cried, kissing her husband’s handsome gold watch-chain (a presentation from his last curacy). “ I know better.”

“ No, my girl, no! But let us be honest, and charitable, if we can.”

CHAPTER XLI

Our papers at Monksbridge only reached us at midday, but within an hour after noon on Monday all Monksbridge knew itself famous: and, though no one condoned young Auberon's transgression because our fame arose out of it, the fame was savoury on the palate of our somewhat remote and unheeded town.

There was a newspaper called the *Flag*, and we all knew it well by name. Some said it had no politics, few believed it had any religion, but all were aware that it had great standing and high influence. It knew all that it behoved omniscience to know; and it seldom stooped to cognizance of local or purely provincial matters. What the Cabinets of Europe had at heart it thoroughly understood, what English folk in border counties were excited about could raise in the columns of the *Flag* neither frown nor smile; such trivialities were beneath it.

But on that marvellous Monday it had an article—"a Leading Article," Mr. Stephen Rumble said, and he was conversant with such high matters—all about Monksbridge. It had no title or heading, and that, Mr. Rumble explained, proved at once that it was a Leading Article. I cannot reproduce it here, but I can give its substance.

"There is," the *Flag* instructed its readers, "a little town, far away on the Welsh Border, but itself in England, in the great, important, and opulent county called Rentshire, in fact: inhabited (at the last census) by something under five thousand of Her Majesty's lieges. The name of the town is Monksbridge, and that name enshrines the history of its origin; for the place grew up in consequence of the building there of a bridge—the only one there for many miles along the reaches of the deep, if not very broad, river Tham—whereby the Rentshire folk could cross into Wales, and the Welsh people pass into England; and that bridge had owed its existence to the public spirit and munificence of certain monks—the community of St. Mary's Abbey, a house of Benedictines founded by one of the Saxon Kings whose own sixth son was its first Abbot. As the hamlet by the bridge grew in population, the neighbouring monks provided, by progressive benefactions, for its spiritual and temporal needs. They built first a chapel, with a 'cell' (for two priests and as many lay-brothers) attached; later on the cell became a Priory, and the small chapel was succeeded by a stately conventual church; a market was inaugurated under charter from the monarch whose brother was Abbot at that time; the town was enclosed within walls—also at the cost of the Abbey. And early in the thirteenth century Abbot Aymer de Belesme founded in the town a school for boys, which he dedicated as the College of Our Lady and St. Peter, obtaining from the Sovereign a charter of incorporation and from the Pope a bull conceding many privileges to the new foundation; the Pope was Honorius III. and the King was Henry III., who was the Abbot's kinsman, that prelate's mother having been a daughter of the King's mother by her second marriage; partly by the influence of the monarch, partly in reward, no doubt, of his personal merit, the Abbot-

Founder of the College of St. Mary and St. Peter was, near the end of his long and useful life, created a Cardinal by Pope Urban IV. Nevertheless, his college continued to be called, and has been called ever since, the Abbot's School. At his death the Cardinal (partly because such a monument would too much encroach on the smaller space of the college chapel, and partly because he had largely rebuilt the chancel of the adjacent Priory Church), was buried in the latter place, in a fine chantry erected in his own lifetime, but under a tomb provided by the munificence and gratitude of the monks and their new Abbot. The name of Cardinal de Belesme is more widely known than that of Monksbridge, because he founded, in addition to the local school, a college at Oxford, where many eminent persons have been students.

"It is time," said the article, "that we should now say something of the various scholarships attached to the Monksbridge school and the Oxford College. At first the former was to consist of a Warden, twelve fellows (in honour of the twelve Apostles), and thirty-three scholars—in commemoration of the reputed years of Christ's life on earth, and as many 'Town Boys' as should be in need of education; these last were to receive education only, all the rest were to be fed, clothed, and housed. When the Founder became a Cardinal he raised the number of 'scholars' to seventy, being the full number of the princes of the Church, and changed their black gown into a red one—which, by a quaint survival, is still worn by these young people. As the Founder's life was very long, he, from time to time, enriched the school with various prizes, some of considerable value, in money;

and when he had founded his college at Oxford he endowed certain scholarships for students there, only eligible to the ‘Red Boys’ of his school at Monksbridge—one of these is, now at all events, of the enormous comparative value of three hundred a year. In the deed of Foundation de Belesme laid down that the school was for the teaching, first and foremost, of the Holy Catholic Faith, to the knowledge of which all other learning, how pretty and convenient soever as ornament and ’broidery, was but handmaiden and servant. Accordingly, to every one of his prizes and scholarships was annexed the condition that the candidate should prove his proficiency in such knowledge of the teaching of the Holy Roman and Catholic Church. No Town Boy could be advanced to the red gown without satisfying the Warden and Fellows of his proper science in these matters; and, later on, when Peter College (now known everywhere as Balaam, a supposed corruption of Belesme or de Belesme) was founded, the Cardinal decreed that no Monksbridge scholar should be awarded his great Exhibition (Prize, it was called then), except he who should best treat in Latin of the Immaculate Conception of ‘Godde’s Mother,’ of Transubstantiation in the Eucharist, of the Primacy of Peter (Heavenly Patron of the College), and of the Office and Intercession of Angels and Saints.

“The remoteness of Monksbridge may partly, but cannot wholly, account for its comparative immunity at the Reformation. King Henry, of conjugal and very pious memory, made short work of the great neighbouring abbey, and did so well out of its spoils, and of those of the town priory, that perhaps he spared the college with less reluctance. The Abbot refused the Oath of Supremacy in religion, and was duly hanged, drawn, and quartered, with little of that tedious delay so common in affairs of law; as were, then or afterwards, most of the monks. The Monksbridge Prior had the same difficulty in perceiving how the King could be head of the Catholic Church, and seems to have been of an argumentative disposition; according to him, either the old religion was wrong or the Pope was right, and he also was hanged, as His Majesty loved ever to keep the last word in an argument. The Warden of Abbot's saw his neighbour die, and he, good easy man, felt himself unworthy of the Martyr's Crown; to get to heaven, body and soul, was plainly desirable, but to arrive there in detachments, from the four places where his four quarters might be disposed, was but a confusing idea. He took the oath, and subscribed everything—the Six Articles, and what not—as subscription was required. Meekly following his lead, four of the twelve fellows did the like; the other eight were imprisoned, five died of the rigour of their confinement, three were hanged. As the fellowships fell vacant, they were filled by gentlemen of the Court, to whom the King explained that so great an honour needed no recompense, and their stalls became honorary, and were mostly unoccupied by their holders. Under Henry there was no Wardeness. Under Edward VI. the then Warden conquered any personal predilection for clerical celibacy he may have felt, and dutifully espoused a waiting-woman in the household of the Lord Protector—a termagant, but useful to her husband.

"And why do we regale our readers with all this pretty archæology? Because an odd thing has happened, and Monksbridge is all agog. It seems that among the Red Boys of Abbot's School, the Cardinal's Seventy, is one Auberon, with the appropriate name of Peter, appropriate to the College of St. Mary and St. Peter, and to that of St. Peter's House at Oxford, the great scholarship in which, already mentioned, he has lately gained—whether in reward of his treatises concerning the Conception of the Virgin, etc., we will not presume to decide. This youth, of eighteen summers, should in due course proceed to Oxford in the enjoyment of the prize he has earned. But lo! a portent. A clergyman's son, and (as report declares) prospective son-in-law of a bishop, the lad incontinently proclaims himself a Catholic! Tableau! For three centuries and some twenty years, Abbot's School has been duly Protestant: a flower on the fair robe of the Establishment. And lo, on its hem appears a Popish weed! What next? To 'Balaam' it seems certain he cannot go as Cardinal's Exhibitioner. Is his Exhibition vacant? Must it remain so till he dies? *He* cannot draw the income of that Exhibition—or can he? If not, who can? Can any one? Can any other boy gain it? Or is he still in possession? At Abbot's School he clearly cannot remain, even if he chose; for the Red Boys are *ex officio* choristers, and whether they can sing or no, must sing in the Protestant services of the Protestant Priory Church. These be great questions: and the answer to them may direct a belated light upon the whole fabric of Abbot's School. Has there ever been any Parliamentary Statute whereby the *de facto* Protestantism of

Abbot's School is made *de jure* and obligatory? If not, such Statute may, and probably must, be provided. One scents a Royal Commission in the air. But if no present Statute to the point exists, and a new one is 'indicated' (as the faculty say), how can such Statute be retrospective? How can young Auberon (who raises the Catholic population of the world to three hundred millions and one) be dispossessed of his lawfully earned income as Cardinal de Belesme's Exhibitioner?

"We pause for a reply."

There was a good deal more of the article; I have only quoted some paragraphs; and every word in it was read again and again by everybody at Monksbridge who got hold of the paper. Lady Llantwddwy heard of the articles from her maid, and borrowed the paper from her butler. Miss Belvoir tried hard to borrow a copy, and had to send out and buy one—which confirmed her bad opinion of young Auberon. There were half a dozen copies flying about Abbot's School, and at Prior's House there was one. The Mayor had it, and all the Aldermen; every lawyer in the two towns had his copy, and old Mr. Stiff declared that he should not be surprised if young Auberon should prove to have a case; but then, every one knew he was a Dissenter and would rejoice to believe in anything tiresome, as likely to happen to a Church foundation. The Rev. Mr. Bibble was shocked to think how carelessly the Reformers had dealt with such a place—dedicated to "Our Lady and St. Peter."

By bedtime half the tradesmen in Monksbridge had it on good authority that young Auberon was going to claim four thousand pounds damages from the

Warden and Fellows, and half of that half saw no reason why he shouldn't get them.

Mrs. Hawthorn thought it likely enough that the eldest Miss Auberon's brother would claim anything, no matter how iniquitous, but had too much confidence in the Lord Chancellor (who must be a Protestant) to believe he would get sixpence. The Vicar pooh-poohed the whole idea of the claim, but thought the point of law interesting, and would not deny that there might be some inquiry into the income of the school, and its application, which would perhaps give his neighbour the Warden some trouble.

"They're cutting everything down," he observed, "and twelve hundred a year and extras—house, coals, lighting, and what not—is too much, now they're cutting down the bishops and deans."

The Warden himself was angrier with Auberon than he had been yet—especially when he received, at luncheon time on Monday, a telegram from the Bishop of Lowminster saying it would not be possible for him to preach at Monksbridge, as he was confined to his bed at Rood Palace with an attack of gout. The Bishop had heard from Lord Monksbridge by that morning's post, and on the top of the letter came that article in the *Flag*. It was when he read in it that the now notorious Peter Auberon was "prospective son-in-law to a bishop," that the prospective "father-in-law" took to his bed. The indecency of the modern press (he had always been strong for its "freedom") quite sickened him. And in his bed only, if indeed there, could he escape the conjectural face of Miss Garboyle. She knew he was going to Monksbridge, and she knew that her papa had been meeting these Auberons, in grand houses whither she had not been taken. Of course she also read the article, as did other bishops' daughters; but her papa was the only bachelor or widower bishop in England.

"Son-in-law to a bishop," she cried. "What can the man mean? A boy of eighteen can't be engaged to be married."

"Of course not, of course not," almost moaned her father. "It is just the scandalous licence of the press. Probably the wretched, misguided lad never saw a bishop's daughter, or a bishop either, in his life."

"Oh, but, papa, he is eighteen. He must have seen a bishop if he has been confirmed——"

"And very likely he has not," her papa declared, as though endeavouring to account for the lad's fall.

"Then his parents—his mother (he has no father, it appears)——"

"No, my dear. She is a widow—a widow of long standing."

"Ah! But she must be greatly to blame herself if her only son has never (at eighteen) been confirmed. It's like a cottager, or those manufacturing people. I never *heard* of a *lady* with unconfirmed sons nearly grown up. As you say, it seems only too likely the poor neglected youth never was confirmed—but what a responsibility for *her!* What must she be feeling now?"

The Bishop had scarcely leisure to imagine how any one else was feeling, he knew too well what he was feeling himself. But he didn't like to hear Mrs. Auberon thus solemnly condemned, and, of course, he had no reason whatever for supposing that the poor lady's son had never been confirmed.

He moaned a little and said, "In the foot. I hope it won't rise to the stomach."

"No, papa. We must hope not; but why should it? it never has, you know. 'Son-in-law'—in books they often call step-sons sons-in-law; Dickens does. Do you think the man means step-son, papa?"

There was that in Miss Garboyle's tone that made her father quail.

"No, Carry; I don't suppose he meant anything but insolence. There's an animus in the whole article—a sneering tone against the Church; some Radical fellow of no sort of Church principles."

Now, Miss Garboyle was not used to hearing Radicals severely handled; her papa was only a Whig, but, even then, Whigs had Radical friends and supporters.

"Perhaps," she suggested, "he's a Tory and a Roman Catholic."

"Perhaps," agreed the Bishop, though he did not think so; then, his native honesty (and his habit of setting his daughter right) prevailed, and he added: "No, Carry; you don't understand these things. There are no Roman Catholics connected with the *Flag;* they're all Radicals and Disestablishment people, and the tone is . . . But you don't understand at all. I think I shall have to go to bed."

"Yes, do, papa. 'Step-son!' I wonder if it means step-son?"

Then the Bishop fled, and from his bedroom sent off the telegram excusing himself from coming to Monksbridge. Miss Garboyle knew it had been dispatched, and she was quite sure that "the man meant step-son." Young Auberon must be an abandoned lad, but she had never expected much from the family; and certainly Providence does marvellously bring good out of evil. On the whole she could not help feeling that, if some ill-disposed and ill-guided youth was to become a Roman Catholic, it was a wonderfully lucky thing that Mrs. Auberon's son should be the boy. It seemed to her quite impossible that a bishop who had written so much, and preached so much, and spoken (even in London) so much against Rome and the Scarlet Lady of that ilk, could so far forget himself as to become "father-in-law" to a notorious young apostate of whom England was hearing. "The man," no doubt, was a conscienceless fellow, who would be ready to do any mischief in the cause of Disestablishment and so on (Disestablishment, she concluded, meant doing away with bishops and their palaces), but, after all, her papa had always taught her that the liberty of the press was our safeguard, and in this instance it might prove to have been hers.

The Warden, when he got the Bishop's telegram, was reading the article aloud to Mrs. FitzSimon, and he almost swore. Swear he never did, but he meant nearly the same thing when he cried out—

"Good heavens! What a feeble creature! What an idiot!"

"Who, my dear?" asked Mrs. Fitz, with eager curiosity.

"Why, Garboyle—the Bishop. He won't come. He's gone to bed. 'Prospective son-in-law to a bishop,' that's what has sent him to bed with the gout, and the old fool" (the Warden was ten months the elder of the two) "can't see that he's fitting the cap on his own head. Good gracious!"

"And do you mean," demanded Mrs. Fitz, with rising fierceness, "that he was coming here to see *her?* You do? Then I call it a gross impertinence. Did you ask him? Didn't he propose himself? Did *we* want him? And he oils himself into our house to carry on a *liaison* with a widow!"

"A *liaison?* fie, my dear! No doubt he meant to propose to her."

"Propose! to propose—to Mrs. Auberon, from this Warden's Lodge! And he a bishop, and she a curate's widow!"

"Well, he couldn't exactly propose to a curate's wife. But what a pusillanimous old woman!"

"Pusillanimous! Old woman, if you like; for all she pretends she married at sixteen, I'll engage she'll never see forty-five again. 'Pusillanimous!' rather the contrary; barefaced, you should say. If I were a widow——"

"God forbid, my dear. And let us hope that, if any such accident befell, you'd be a bishop's widow yourself. Well, well; let him stop away."

"I shouldn't think he'd show his face *here* in a hurry, now all the world knows. After proposing himself, and I bought things for his bedroom, a china inkstand and a new quilt; at least I bought them at the bazaar, and decided to put them on his bed."

Presently the Warden went back to the article in the *Flag;* he had hardly got beyond the prospective son-in-law when the Bishop's telegram arrived, and his anger against young Auberon gathered as he reached the final paragraphs. So, forsooth, because a slip of a boy in his own school had decided that the Church of England wasn't good enough for him, there was to be an inquiry into the whole legal status of Abbot's and its endowments! That sort of wickedness was in the air—and the *Flag* was precisely the sort of quarter whence such pestilential winds were likely to blow.

"They're cutting everything down," he declared, with a black frown. "Bishops' incomes, Deaneries—everything: and this Wardenship is one of the best things in the Church. I know many deans think it a better thing than what they've got. Our foundation is all land, and it has gone on improving in value—so much of it built on, and old common-land enclosed and improved. Good gracious! And all to come from the action of a moony-pated boy!"

"He has bad blood, my dear. You never know how it'll come out. But—Warden! Do you really think they'll cut us down?"

And Mrs. Fitz turned almost as bad a colour as if she were hanging already.

"Do you think," she added, "he'll *claim,* as the man in the paper seems to think he might?"

"There's no saying what he'll do; but it isn't any claim of his I should fear—that would be a small matter, and besides, it's nonsense."

"But the *Flag* seems to think it isn't nonsense."

"Oh, the *Flag!* The *Flag* will say anything, and pretend to think anything; it's a Royal Commission, or an inquiry I should dislike: that would——"

"Good gracious, Herbert! You really think they might cut us down!" cried Mrs. Fitz again.

At that moment in Prior's House her friend the Vicar was saying—

"I really think if there *was* an inquiry they'd be cut down; they'd feel it."

"I should think so," Mrs. Hawthorn agreed comfortably; "of course, they've never saved a penny; living so high and always expecting to get a deanery or something."

CHAPTER XLII

On Monday evening our servant, Hannah, observed to Mamma that all the town was talking of Mr. Peter, and how he was going to get five thousand pounds damages out of Abbot's School; and presently, in a great flutter, Mamma came into the drawing-room and told us about it. Hannah had lent her the paper, and now Sylvia took it.

"Read it aloud, dear," begged Mamma, settling herself down to knit.

"For goodness' sake don't," said Perkin; "I'm sick of it already. When I was out, a dozen people were at me about it. It's a horrible thing that the papers can't let people alone: and it's written by some radical fellow who wants to make a bother or——"

"You've read it yourself, then?" Sylvia interrupted.

"Yes. Hours ago. Please don't read it aloud—it makes me sick."

Sylvia took no notice of this, and was evidently going to read the article aloud. So Perkin went off to the library and wrote a letter. Then Mamma said what Hannah had told her. When she came to the prospective son-in-law Sylvia stumbled and pouted angrily, and I got red in the face; poor Mamma's fingers trembled as she knitted, and instead of blushing she grew quite pale. I think she was hurt, too, with Sylvia for reading the thing aloud, though at her own request.

Poor Mamma! it seemed to her as if all England were talking about her.

Sylvia, when she had finished the article, felt rather less angry with Perkin; he was a bad, tiresome boy, who had done great mischief—but Hannah had said that everybody thought he would get five thousand pounds "damages," and the *Flag* clearly thought that something of the kind might be possible. A boy of eighteen, with five thousand pounds, might be (and this boy was) thoroughly naughty, senseless, and misbehaving; still, one could not despise him quite in the same way as if he had simply thrown all he had away.

At that moment Perkin was on his way to Warden's Lodge with a note that he had written in the library. At the Doctor's door he rang, and presently gave the note to the Doctor's *Willoughby,* who stared at him as though a burglar had called to say he would look in again after the family should have gone to bed.

"Please," said Perkin, "give that to the Warden."

The Willoughby hesitated to undertake any such (probably) treasonable commission; but Perkin promptly went away, and the man retreated to his pantry, for a salver and advice.

"Young Auberon's just bin and left this—for the Warden," he explained, calling next in the kitchen.

"Well, I never!" cried the cook. "What brass!"

She and both housemaids crowded round the note, and eyed it as though it were an infernal machine duly labelled as such.

"Him," exclaimed the under-housemaid, "as is for turning master and all of us out of house and home!"

As it happened, the Doctor's bell rang at that moment, and Willoughby went upstairs, note and all.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said apologetically, when face to face with his master, "but a person left this at the front door."

"I heard the bell, and thought it might be the second master, and I wish to see him. I said 'Not at home'; but I wish to see him if he comes across."

The Warden took the note, and Willoughby had to go. He would have lingered outside, in case a messenger for the police were required, but he saw his mistress coming upstairs, and reluctantly went down to the kitchen.

"What did he say?" demanded the cook.

"He didn't say naught. He didn't seem to reckonize the writin'."

"Poor lamb!" cried the under-housemaid. "*I* shouldn't have had the 'art to give it him, not if it had been me."

"It *couldn't* be you," observed the upper-housemaid. "On Willoughby's days out it's my place to take letters up. You talk wild, 'Melia."

Meanwhile the Warden had read the note, which was not long. This was all:—

"Cross Place,
"Monday Night.

"DEAR WARDEN,

"I have seen that hateful article in the *Flag*. How on earth they got hold of it I can't help wondering. No one *knew* here till Saturday afternoon. I write to say this: I resign to you, if it be necessary, any scholarships or exhibitions I held, any rights (if I had any) as a Cardinal's scholar at Abbot's. I simply took it for granted that my becoming a Catholic deprived me of them, as I still believe is the case. If by any chance I was wrong, and any one could pretend they are *not* vacant, and if it would, therefore, save you any trouble or annoyance to say that I have myself resigned them to you in writing, I now do so. I dare say you may think me very officious, but I wanted, if I could, to save you any possible trouble. Thanking you again for all your kindness, and especially on Saturday evening, I am,

"Yours respectfully,
"PETER AUBERON."

His critics said that the Warden was weak, and he could not help admiring the boy. He had been angry with him, had softened towards him, had become much more angry with him, and now he softened again.

"Warden," said Mrs. FitzSimon, coming into the room, "I can't get this worry out of my head. The very servants know all about it. I can see that they are wondering how soon we shall be cut down."

"My dear Sarah! Don't be so—so precipitous, precipitate, I would say. That's nonsense. Even if there were an inquiry, it would take months to appoint the commission, and months and months for them to act; and then there would be their report and all sorts of formalities; and, even if any changes were to be made, it would not be for a long time. Besides, there would be compensation for vested rights, if the worst came to the worst. I see by the evening paper that the Dean of Battersea is very bad—a stroke, and his third . . . "

"Old Dr. Combe-Bisset! Well, he is over ninety, and has been Dean forty years. Poor dear old man!

What courage you have, Herbert! But there'll be a good deal of trouble if this brat of a boy should go to law with us."

"Pfh! He'll do no such thing."

"Oh, you're so trustful! You play no dirty tricks yourself, *you* never scheme; and you can't imagine that others will."

"My dear, he'll play no dirty tricks."

"Ah!" cried Mrs. Fitz, shaking her head dolorously, "you don't realize the power and astuteness of the Jesuits—and, of course, this wretched boy is in their hands."

"My dear, there are no Jesuits at Llanthamy. Read that." And the Warden thrust Perkin's letter into her hands.

She read it slowly (having left her glasses downstairs, she had to hold it afar off), and was not immediately impressed.

"'Cross Place,'" she cried. Then, turning to the signature, "*He,* to write to you! What insolence! The indecency of the lad!"

"Read it, my dear, read it," begged the Warden.

"Well!" said Mrs. Fitz, when she had read it, "I call it a piece of impertinence. Resign his scholarships, indeed! As if they were his! and he turned out of them for apostasy! It merely shows how utterly without a leg to stand on he feels himself. And why should he call it a hateful article? Sheer hypocrisy—his sister all over. Why, the article is all on his side. My belief is he wrote it."

"Sarah, that's absurd. But I wonder who did write it—or, rather, how the writer knew about Auberon and all that?"

"No one knew except himself," Mrs. Fitz declared with angry scorn, tossing back her maize ribbons, which (said Mrs. Stephen Rumble) she wore to carry out her complexion.

"No, no!" said the Warden, "it wasn't Auberon. But *who* was it?"

"Mr. Porker!" announced Willoughby, opening the door to usher in the second master.

"Come in, come in!" said the Warden, not resenting the interruption of his *tête-à-tête*. "Porker," he went on, when Willoughby had disappeared, "Mrs. FitzSimon and I were wondering who could have written the article—who could, I mean, have supplied the data."

But Mrs. Fitz wondered no longer. She had a fine faculty for getting hold of the wrong end of a stick, but a lady who is always seizing sticks must now and then catch one by the right end. When Willoughby had announced Mr. Porker, he had told her the answer to her husband's question.

"An indecent article whoever wrote it!" she observed, with a flaming coldness, turning to the fireplace, but not losing sight of the second master in the glass over it.

Minerva only stared at nothing out of her round blind eyes, and Gibbon merely went on simpering fatly, but Mrs. Fitz took no heed of either, and looked carefully into the mirror.

"A wicked, incendiary article" she cried. "But what can you expect from the *Flag?*"

Now Mr. Porker's younger brother was a rising member of the staff of that powerful, but nefarious paper; had he ever bragged of it? He thought not, but could not be sure. He wished to Heaven he could be sure.

"A regrettable article," he confessed. "It raises questions——"

"Regrettable!" almost screamed Mrs. Fitz, "vile and traitorous."

"Mrs. FitzSimon," the Warden interposed, almost jocosely (willing to be revenged on the partner of his joys, and the cause of some of his minor arrogancies)—"Mrs. FitzSimon thinks that Auberon himself supplied the data!"

"Does she, really?" remarked Mr. Porker, as if a good deal struck by her acuteness. And Mrs. Fitz saw him, very plainly, in the glass.

"I did, for a moment," she observed. "I know better now."

Her tone was not lost on either of her hearers. The Warden looked puzzled, and Mr. Porker did his best to look puzzled too.

"I should not think," he said, rubbing his hands nervously, "that Auberon would take any such step as the *Flag* seems to think he might."

"Of course not," said the lady, as if such an idea could enter no head but Mr. Porker's and that of the writer in the odious *Flag*.

"He *might*, of course," pleaded the wavering second master.

"Tut, tut!" said Mrs. Fitz. "All the low papers in the world couldn't make a boy like that do such an indecent thing."

"His friends—his new friends," urged Mr. Porker, "might persuade him—for the sake of the cause—the

Catholic cause—a mere boy in the hands of Jesuitical intriguers."

"Tut, tut! There are no Jesuits at Llanthamy," cried Mrs. Fitz, impatiently. "Only one old snuffy priest; Father McGuire or O' something——"

"My dear Porker," interposed the Warden, "Auberon will do no such thing. Mrs. FitzSimon" (the second master was an elderly bachelor, and the Warden had—in his weaker moments—envied him; he was not unwilling to thrust wifely wisdom down his throat now). "Mrs. FitzSimon is quite correct in her opinion. Auberon has written to resign, if any such resignation could to human perversity be thought necessary, any rights or scholarships he held here. Quite unnecessary, of course——"

"Ridiculously unnecessary," said Mr. Porker.

"Perhaps," interrupted Mrs. Fitz, "but decently meant; a *gentleman's* action; rendered less foolish by the appearance of such an outrageous, mischief-intending article, written by a penny-a-liner's——"

"My dear!" cried the Warden, "who can say who wrote it?"

"No one will say," observed Mrs. Fitz, with a fell coolness, turning round abruptly, "but we can guess."

"Sarah!" said the Warden, when the second master had gone at last, "what did you mean? Your fierceness positively frightened Porker."

"I meant it to. *He* did it."

"Wrote the article!"

"Sent the data as you call them. He has boasted of a brother of his on the Press—the *Times,* he would have liked us to think. Mark my words, he sent the data. That brother of his is on the *Flag*. He sent the data."

To do him justice, Mr. Porker would have given his eyes not to have sent them. When, on leaving the Warden's study late on Saturday afternoon he had walked out to the railway station—four miles from Monksbridge, as the reader may recollect—he had not at first intended to do any such thing. He often took that walk for the sake of exercise, and because he liked to see a train come in or go out; and on this particular evening he expected a parcel which he knew would not be delivered till Monday, unless he fetched it himself. All the way, however, he was thinking of young Auberon, and wondering whether a new examination would have to be held for the scholarship at "Balaam," or whether the boy who had scored second marks, after Auberon, would be entitled to the scholarship by succession, so to speak. At the station he first thought of sending a telegram to his brother, and what he sent was only this:—

To
Wiltshire Porker, Esq., Cannibals Club, London. Excitement here. Peter Auberon, eighteen, son clergyman's widow here, Cardinal's Scholar Abbot's, and recent gainer Cardinal's Scholarship, Balaam, turned Catholic, vacates everything.—Matthias.

When the younger Mr. Porker received the message he was dining at the Cannibals Club with a country friend, the Rev. Austin Singer, a Minor Canon of Lowminster, who had just told him that his Bishop was shortly proceeding to Monksbridge, ostensibly to preach for the Warden of Abbot's, but, as was rumoured in the Close, to cement an alliance with a pretty Mrs. Auberon of that town, in whose company he had been recently thrown at various great houses. The Minor Canon was Highish and didn't especially admire the Bishop, but liked Miss Garboyle much better, whom he considered more of a suitable age for matrimony. From him, and from the Encyclopedias (carefully collated and supplemented by references to the Rev. Cope Pinnacle's "History of Ecclesiastical Foundations in England"), Mr. Porker had derived all the information which appeared in his article.

CHAPTER XLIII

When old Mr. Stiff heard that young Auberon had resigned, in writing, any rights he might have, he almost groaned.

"Dear, dear! A very uncalled-for measure," he declared, "most ill-advised! Who can have advised him? If it was that Irish lawyer, O'Riordan, I'm sorry for his clients."

All the same, Mr. Stiff felt a sort of warming round the cockles of his old heart, and never spoke slightingly of "that headlong boy" again. He was honest enough himself, and, though he had a strong professional disapproval of signing any right, or chance of a right, away, still, under his shabby waistcoat there was something not merely professional. He was not, himself, quite a gentleman, but he was aware that many gentlemen came to ask him how they might do things which he would not have done, and he understood well enough what had made that clear-faced lad sit down and write off to renounce any claim to "damages." He thought Catholics far more securely bound for the wide-mouthed haven of perdition even than the worldly, tepid, Erastian members of the Establishment, but he liked them rather better—Llanthamy Catholics had no great social standing.

On that Tuesday evening he was shambling, rather heavily, to post his own letters, for he preferred that no unnecessary persons should read their addresses (not that he was in the habit of writing to undesirable people), when his foot slipped, and he nearly tumbled. Llanthamy (inferior to Monksbridge in everything) had a clay soil, quite unlike our Rentshire gravel, and on "soft" days its streets were apt to be clammy and slimy.

"Dear, dear!" cried Mr. Stiff, as he felt his paralytic leg going from under him; and he sprawled, and flung his arms out, and all his letters slipped from his hand. But he didn't come down after all.

"Hold up! It's all right, Mr. Stiff," a cheery young voice sounded over his shoulder, quite close to one of his big yellowish ears; and a pair of very strong young arms gripped him under the armpits, and set him on his legs again.

"I hope you'll excuse me grabbing you like that," laughed Perkin, "and not think me as presumptuous as the Princess of Spain, who had the fellow beheaded that clutched hold of her to prevent her tumbling and breaking her leg."

"Did she, though—the baggage?" cried Mr. Stiff, with wonderful presence of mind. "A Spanish princess, eh? Bad place that, where the Inquisition comes from."

Perkin laughed again, and the old man gave a grunting chuckle, as the lad bent down to gather up the letters. Mr. Stiff could not have stooped like that; what Miss Stiff called his lower chest was so formed that he could only stoop round it, so to speak, and it wasn't a swift or easy process. He noticed, with extreme approval, that the boy picked the letters up, as they had fallen, face-downwards, and so returned them to their owner; it would have been so natural to read the addresses!

"Good night, Mr. Stiff," says Perkin, lifting his cap, and making off.

"Good night, sir, and thank you," said the old man, looking after the lad's straight, slim figure. "A poor Samaritan," he thought to himself, "but a pleasant, kind-hearted lad, and comely."

Perhaps that other Samaritan was quite young after all, and had a pleasant way of talking; and he may have been comely. There's no Divine law necessarily connecting ugliness and grimness with the sort of neighbourliness that was held up for our example in that citizen of a despised and naughty town.

"He shouldn't have signed any renunciation whatever," the old lawyer said to himself, as he dropped his letters one by one into the slit of the post-office. "I couldn't have advised it."

But as he jogged home (very cautiously now) he did, dimly, realize that a young lad who is a gentleman and isn't giving that up, with other pleasant things, for conscience' sake, may find advice somewhere that no attorney could give him, and that may be none the worse for that. Anyway, he did not join in any real abuse of Perkin any more, but would only shake his big, pale head and say, "Ill advised, no doubt, throughout."

Sylvia was of the same opinion, but she only said so at home.

"Everybody seems to think," Mamma observed, that same Tuesday night, "that Perkin can claim very heavy damages for his invested interests, as they call them; twelve hundred pounds at least; even Mr. Bloom, I understand, admits four years' purchase."

"No, Mamma," I interposed. "All Mr. Bloom said was that the whole value of the scholarship at Balaam could only be twelve hundred pounds—at four years' purchase; Miss Belvoir told me."

"Well, that's what I say," urged Mamma.

"If," said Sylvia, "Mr. Bloom admits twelve hundred, you may be sure it's more—that Perkin might get more."

"But," I said, "Perkin has resigned every possible claim. He wrote to the Warden last night and said so."

"Dear Perkin!" cried Mamma, her pretty eyes glistening.

But Sylvia had much finer eyes, and they only expressed criticism.

"How do you know?" she asked coldly. "He told you? And why not all of us? His whole procedure has been bad, headstrong, wilful, and self-opinionated. He should have consulted—us. He had no right at all to throw away any indemnity (indemnification) that might be legally due to him without taking our advice. Before signing anything he should have consulted his family. Hampden could have guided him, and consulted legal counsel for him."

"Oh!" I said. "Hampden! Is he likely to ask Hampden's advice after the way Hampden treated him on Saturday?"

This made Sylvia all the more displeased with Perkin, because she was seriously displeased with Hampden, and it was Perkin's fault.

Hampden had not been near us since Saturday. He was sulking. And that very morning he had gone away. A dog-cart had taken him to the station, and the groom had, on his way back, brought Sylvia a note, as follows:—

"Llanthamy Castle, Tuesday.

"DEAR SYLVIA,

"I have to go to London. Inverchlory telegraphed yesterday that he cannot now speak at the meeting. You can guess why he thinks it better not to come down just at present. It would be very marked if he stayed with me without (as he intended) seeing you all, and he can hardly wish to come to Cross Hall just yet. You know how strongly he takes up the Protestant cause, and he can scarcely wish to meet your brother; nor can I pretend to do so at the moment. But Inverchlory wrote yesterday (he had read that highly objectionable article in the *Flag;* I hope your brother's *new friends* had no hand in it; it would be deplorable taste), I got his letter at 7.30 a.m. to-day; he begs me to come to town and take my seat in the Lords; since my dear father's death, you know, Parliament has not been sitting; he suggests that he (you know that he is Baron Fennskip in the English peerage) and the Duke of Clantuddlem (who sits as Viscount Houndsditch) should introduce me. It is uncommonly friendly of them *at this juncture,* for both are on the extreme Protestant side, and both of great position and weight; the Duke is High Commissioner for the Kirk of Scotland; in fact, I may say that though religion and politics are, perhaps, not necessarily connected, my own leaning is to the Protestant side, which, after all, is that of safety and loyalty. So I am going up now, and the man who takes me to the station will bring this. I wish I could have seen you yesterday or on Sunday, but my mother has not been well (the events of Saturday affected her sadly), and I dare say your brother would not regret my absence.

"Yours ever,

"MONKSBRIDGE."

Sylvia knew perfectly that it was not a good-tempered letter, and that her betrothed was sulky. There was not a word of entreaty for their speedy marriage, as there had been in every note he had sent her since his father's death, and, though she was as far as possible from being on Perkin's side, it was plain that Lord Monksbridge, in every allusion to her brother's great misconduct, was almost scolding her. She did not believe in the least that his mother had really been ill, only he had been feeling awkward and cross, and had not tact enough to come and see her as if nothing had happened: nor had he the pluck to write plainly, objecting to her treatment of himself, so he abused her brother sideways.

All this annoyed her seriously: the Bishop was not coming, Lord Inverchlory was not coming, thus had Perkin's folly and misbehaviour injuriously affected his mother's and younger sister's interests. A little red spot appeared on her cheeks as she asked herself, "What if Hampden himself should draw back?" He must know her well enough to be sure that the very slightest sign of any such desire would make her end the engagement herself. Sylvia in her own way was full of pride, and she had never considered him as equal to her—most certainly she would not marry him if he wavered in his sense of her great goodness in becoming his wife. I have signally failed in drawing her portrait if the reader thinks of her as a girl determined to marry a rich young lord at any price. And there was nothing to wound her heart in the idea of not marrying him, for she cared no more for him than for any other man: she never would care for any man; the only person she really liked much was her mother—yet to have to break off her marriage after so long and public an engagement would be very trying, and, though she would do it if necessary, her anger against Perkin grew very deep as she thought of it, and deeper still as she thought of all she had meant to do, and could have done, for Hampden's family and her own. She had nearly succeeded, she believed, in those great plans of public usefulness, after patient consideration and hard, though willing, work—and now, by a boy's hasty folly, failure was almost threatening. She contrived to make Perkin's home very unpleasant for him in those days. All the same, she snubbed old Lady Llantwddwy, who came to call, and said almost as soon as she had sat down—

"I hope your naughty brother is not in, Marjory. I'm the weakest creature! and if he clapped a candle in my hand, and insisted on my turning Catholic, I should succumb!" Of course she laughed as she said this. "So," she added, "he has renounced his claims to legal compensation—very pretty of him, I must say—for they tell me he might have caused a deal of annoyance, if he had done as that wicked *Flag* suggested."

"There could never," said Sylvia, "have been the least fear of it in the mind of any one who knew him. He is a bad boy, and is behaving quite outrageously, but being a Roman Catholic won't alter his being an

Auberon. He would think no more of money than any of us; and it only shows how little Monksbridge understands a gentleman's feelings that it is so astonished at his behaving like one."

"Don't eat me, my dear," cried the old Viscountess, quite meekly: "I only meant to praise him."

"Oh, dear Lady Llantwddwy," said my sister with terrible graciousness, "*you're* not a Monksbridgian. There are islands in Monksbridge, like Littlepark and Cross Place."

"And Island Court," suggested her ladyship, whose mind was rather literal than inclined to metaphor.

CHAPTER XLIV

All this while, the reader may be wondering whether I had sent any telegram to Lady Hermione. When I returned from Miss Belvoir's, on that fateful Saturday, I had certainly thought of doing so: the Bishop was coming and Lord Inverchlory was coming—but then came Perkin's announcement, and it seemed to me mean to run away and leave him in the midst of his great unpopularity. On Sunday, however, I wrote and told Hermione all about it, ending with a bold-sounding, but really timorous, suggestion. I knew she was at Severn Court again; did she think Lady Severn would invite us *both,* Perkin and me, to come there?

On Tuesday morning I received her reply: which ran thus—

"Severn Court,
"Monday.

"Dear Muggles,

"What a beast you'll say I am! Aunt Muriel begs you to come here if you will, and wanted to write herself; but I told her not to. And Uncle Severn *wants* you to come; and of course I do. But I don't believe you'd come now without Perkin, and Perkin is a bad boy. You know they take every sort of paper here, and that horrid *Flag* is full of him to-day. Neither Uncle Severn nor Aunt Muriel are bigoted, but they are very *churchy,* and Mamma is just a little Low (church, I mean); they're all three nervous, and are afraid for Briggy and me! *I'm so* very *religious, you know,* and so likely to join a religion that wouldn't be easy unless I fasted all day long, and lay on a plank all night (except when I had to get up and whip myself with a—what K.G.'s wear). Of course you'll think me horrid, laughing like this; but *seriously,* I know they are nervous; I don't often strike up fierce friendships, and I did with you. So did Briggy, and they know it. We always said we were all for Perkin, and it's become a sort of little proverb among us all. And now he's going to be the Pope, and Mamma and Aunt Muriel—and Uncle Severn too, in a way—are nervous; if you and Perkin were here together, of course we should be, all four of us, as thick as thieves, and he would twiddle us three round his finger. I see you are all on his side, and are probably in a convent by now, and the Abbess won't let you read this, so I'll just put in for *her* (to pay her out for reading other people's letters) that I don't like the Catholic religion at all, and would take good care to have something to say if I had to go to Confession. All the same, Mamma wouldn't trust me with a new-blown convert, and Aunt Muriel wouldn't trust Briggy, especially as he's taken Perkin's part *violently.* *I* abused your bad brother up hill and down dale, but he said out that he thought him *splendid,* and asked his mother whether she thought boys of eighteen in general so keen about religion that they would give up all they had in the world for it. I think that frightened her and Mamma—and even Uncle Severn—more than anything. Briggy got red, and looked very handsome and honest, and I dare say they thought that the moment he met Perkin he would fly into his arms and say, ‘Please, I'm another. Pray hand me into the Catholic Church immediate.’ Oh! Muggles, can't you *see* why I write such silly, flippant, nasty stuff? I feel such a pig, and you'll think us *all* pigs—*I* should. We *begged* you to come here, and we say we'll only have you without Perkin, and I know you'll not come without him. *You're* a pig if you do, though I hope and beg you will. No, I don't; I don't believe the Bishop or Lord I. will bother either you or your Mamma this little while. Did Perkin and you plot the whole thing? But I should think you a perfect S. if you came and left him all alone to face her, and her Monksbridge, and everything. Tell him from me (not his lordship) that I utterly condemn him and like him very much. And, dear Muggles, try to understand how ashamed I feel of us all.

"Your affectionate

"GLORUM."

At the end was a little postscript from Briggy.

"Tell Perkin I do think him splendid. Glorum won't let me see what she has written, and I'm sure it's all it oughtn't to be. But she is all for Perkin still, and is dashing about abusing us all to our faces and threatening to become an abbess next week, because father and mother don't think it would be quite the best thing to ask him here yet. You see, she's only eighteen herself—and I'm only nineteen and a bit—and they know we are fond of you both, and—do try and understand—father and mother don't *really* blame him for doing what he thinks right. You don't know how good they are, only they would so dislike me or Glorum doing the same sort of thing, and we never come across fellows (or girls) of our age who think much of religion in that way at all, and they think it might put it in our heads. It's partly my fault (so don't blame father and mother, or Aunt Hester entirely), for I flared up about the old religion, and said Perkin was only belonging to the religion all our fine forefathers believed in. Post is just leaving; I can't write more. But do give my love to him, and say how I do admire him. So does Glorum, just as much.

"Your ever affectionate

"BRIGGY."

"Of course, I couldn't go anywhere," Perkin reminded me, when I told him what I had proposed, and how my proposal had been a failure. "I am being instructed, and can't go away anywhere till it's over and I am received——" but he read Hermione's letter and Briggy's postscript, and he didn't scold me for having made an offer of his company at Severn Court and been refused.

"How nice they are—all of them!" he said, when he had finished; and I saw his odd, chocolate-brown eyes shining. "I like Briggy best, for sticking up for his father and mother so."

"They're just the same, Glorum and Briggy; only she's a girl——"

And now, I am going to say good-bye to you; to you, if there are any of you, who have stuck to me and Perkin all this while. A long farewell, and it will take a little time.

I read a book once, some years ago, that ended with a question to which each reader might give the answer he liked best. *I* will answer some of the questions you may want to put; the rest I will leave you to answer as you choose.

Instead, then, of *Finis* at the end of this book I shall write only my initials—M. B., and what do they stand for? Marjory Bridgenorth? No, for Briggy has been Lord Severn these twenty years, and I am the only member of my family whose husband or wife has no title. As poor Sylvia used to remark, quite patiently, anybody might have foreseen that Marjory "would only marry a gentleman," and I did. Though he was Sergeant-Surgeon to His late Majesty, my husband is not even Sir Hubert; whereas Sylvia's, for his high political services, became Earl of Llanthamy of Llanthamy Castle, in 1880, and Marquess of Monksbridge in 1901. And Perkin, though he thought but poorly of me, once, for going a Duke-ing—Perkin's eldest son will be a peer, and his wife never was Mrs. Auberon; she signs herself, in semi-state, "Hermione"; in full state "Cressy," and in undress—so to speak—"Glorum."

She never became an abbess, but one of her five daughters is a nun, and one of her three sons is a priest in the slummiest part of a northern town that looks *all* slums from the train.

There is no Mrs. Auberon. But our dear mother is alive and hardly looks very old.

The present Lady Inverchlory, a good deal younger than his lordship, was a Miss Massachusetts of America; but when they are down in Lincolnshire, where she attends the parish church (in London she is a Christian Scientist), she passes, on her way through the chancel to the great family pew, still unprofaned by the restorer, a monument inscribed as Sacred to the Memory of Belisante, wife of Ronald, tenth Earl of Inverchlory, ("first wife" thinks the former Miss Massachusetts, not intolerantly), daughter and heiress of Sir Hamelyn Beaufront, of Beausite, in this county, fifth baronet.

There is no Mrs. Auberon. Fate herself was hardly a match for our Sylvia, and—well, it happened in this way: As the time of her marriage drew on, my sister wrote, without mentioning the fact to any of us, to the Bishop of Lowminster.

"The Archbishop," said she, "is going to marry me to Lord Monksbridge; his wife, you know, was a Drum, of Sir Stapleton's family, from whom my mother inherited this dear place: and the Dean of Battersea (our old mutual friend the Warden) is to assist him—I do not think a *Bishop* should *assist* even an Archbishop. Nevertheless, I would fain be so bold as to ask a dear friend, most highly valued, to—— My dear lord, how can I ask my poor brother to give me away? You know the sad, sad religious difference that divides us. *He* might be willing, for he is a loving brother (and most dutiful son), but I can hardly even wish to ask him. It would, as I look at things, be scarcely decent to invite *him* to stand with me before an" ("Altar" she had written, but changed it to "Communion Table") "from which, alas! he has severed himself. Would it be too great a presumption to hope that you, my dear lord, would—you know we have no father—stand for that one day in a father's place, and place my hand in my future husband's? Your dear daughter I do not, much as I have always wished it, know: but, if *you* would consent to what I so boldly propose (after all, every proposal worth making involves some boldness!), perhaps you would tell her how greatly I should like to count her as one of my ten bridesmaids" (one of the original ten, Lady Rosamond Montacute, had just been announced by her mother, Lady Stonehenge, as developing unmistakable scarlatina).

When the Bishop read Sylvia's letter he longed to say Yes, but was not at once sure whether he dared say anything but No. In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird, unless indeed the bird likes the look of it, and would not mind being inside. The Bishop would like, but there was Carry. Still, that odious article in the *Flag* had led to nothing much (the Bishop didn't particularly object to the "cutting down" Mrs. FitzSimon had once so fearfully dreaded; nor, indeed, did she now she was getting ready to move to the Deanery, and understood that Mr. Porker was likely to be the new Warden—seven hundred a year would be far too much for him). Many papers had descanted on Abbot's School, but not a single one had said a word as to young Auberon's prospective father-in-law.

"My lord," cried his lordship's domestic chaplain, hurrying in, almost without knocking, "my lord, a dreadful thing has happened. Dr. Flebly, the Rector of Billincoot, has gone off—gone off with——"

"Good gracious, Tumbler, gone off! with whom?"

"Oh, my lord, No!" cried the chaplain, quite blushing. "With apoplexy—dead, my lord! In his gig."

"Dear, dear! You shock me! With apoplexy——"

and the Bishop rose, and shook himself, and stretched his neck a little, as though to prove it was longer than it looked. "A bachelor, though: it is harder on a beneficed clergyman when there is a wife—and children. He had only a sister."

"Yes, my lord: a sister," said Mr. Tumbler, with a meek sigh—he had two, who lived with him.

"Dear me! It is very sad," observed the Bishop, not thinking much of the two Miss Tumblers. He was thinking, in fact, of a daughter, and he evidently rather wished to be alone. Poor Mr. Tumbler —trying not to think of Billincoot Rectory—went away, and the Bishop presently betook himself to the drawing-room, where he found Miss Garboyle making a "kissiboo," out of red and white duster-cloth, for some little African boy she would never see.

"Carry," he said, with a solemn resignation that was almost cheerful, "Dr. Flebly, the Rector of Billincoot (a Rural Dean), has been taken. It is very sad. He was quite well this morning, and now he is gone. Of apoplexy; in his gig. On his way, as I make no doubt, to discharge some Ruridecanal function—a very exemplary clergyman."

Miss Garboyle, who had only seen Dr. Flebly once, was duly shocked.

"But still, papa, if he was a good man, and prepared, and in the discharge of his duty—I don't understand much about Rural Deans."

"Quite so. Of course not. I felt the same," said the Bishop, rather absent-mindedly. "But, Carry, the living is in my gift: it is my turn to present—the patronage is alternately in the hands of the Bishop and of the Dean and Chapter: it is my turn——"

"Oh, papa! I hope you're not thinking of Mr. Tumbler—he may be an excellent chaplain, but he's not up to a Rural Dean: he snuffles so—he can't *always* have a cold——"

Dr. Garboyle was not, in general, disposed to seek advice from his daughter: but on this occasion he showed no displeasure.

"The Rural Deanship," he explained (mildly), "is not involved in the Rectory. But I wasn't thinking of Tumbler . . . I *had* a thought—what do you think of Mr. Singer?"

Miss Garboyle really blushed, and her father noted the circumstance with inward pleasure.

"An excellent clergyman," remarked the Bishop, "and popular in the diocese" (Miss Garboyle stitched eagerly at the kissiboo, and almost wondered her papa had not thought Mr. Singer of too upward a tendency), "and his father was Archdeacon. I like clergymen of clerical families. Of course he's youngish, but so was poor Flebly; he's been Rector many years, and was not old; about my own time of life. It makes one think——"

"Yes," said Miss Garboyle. "But if he was young when he got it—and Mr. Singer is not much under forty."

"No, my dear, no. A very suitable age." And there came almost a jocosity, certainly a complacence, into her papa's tone as he added, "in every way."

Miss Garboyle did, undoubtedly, blush, and the Bishop observed it with mild triumph.

"The Rural Deanship," he went on, "is *not* involved in the Rectory of Billincoot. But the Rector of Billincoot has usually been a *personage* in the Archdeanconry. Singer is popular (so was his father), and the clergy will like the appointment. It will show, too, that I am not averse to recognising the claims of what is not (precisely) my own party in the diocese. Singer is Higher than we are——"

"Papa, he's not in the least a Puseyite."

"Of course, of course! And I'm sure," said the Bishop, "he won't become one."

"Certainly not," agreed Miss Garboyle, as one making a promise to that effect.

"He," said her papa, affectionately, "shall have it."

"My dear," he added, in a lower tone, "I'm a watchful and loving father" (she felt the appeal, and was conscious that it behoved her to be a loving, and, perhaps, not too watchful, daughter), "and I do this —for public motives of utility, of course, but to please you too."

"Thank you, papa." And Carry almost wished the kissiboo was a pocket-handkerchief without a needle in it.

"And, Carry," he went on, "there are lighter matters to tell you of. The Duchess of Cowchester asks me to go and stay there on the third of next month to confirm young Lord Calfhampton, and I shall take you. Cowpark is worth seeing—one of the ancestral homes of England. I couldn't suggest Tumbler. But I might take Singer as Chaplain *pro tem.* I really think I might."

Carry thought he might, but didn't say so. Then the Bishop asked her if she would like to be a bridesmaid, with nine others, all Lady Somebodies (he forgot me, as people always have done throughout my insignificant life).

"It may be," he added, with undisguised jocosity, "your last chance."

Carry blushed again, and even laughed a little.

Then her papa told her whose wedding it was, and she understood everything perfectly; the giving away of the bride hardly surprised her—but to be a bridesmaid (after going to the Duchess on the third) with nine others, all Lady Cynthias and Lady Arabellas, especially when it would be her last chance, after all it was worth something. And besides, out at Billincoot, what would it matter to her who poured out tea at Rood Palace? Especially as Mrs. Auberon had no title—Carry would have found it much harder to bear cheerfully if some lady of obviously higher social standing than her own had succeeded her.

"Papa," she said (in parenthesis), "wasn't Archdeacon Singer Rector of Billincoot?"

"No, my dear; Vicar of Kiddlemere. But the Archdeaconry is not attached to any benefice. Archdeacon Thumper is very old."

"Well, yes—I don't mind being bridesmaid," said Carry, emerging from her parenthesis, as her papa went into it. "Shall you write and accept, or must I?"

"We have both to accept," replied the Bishop; and Miss Garboyle felt that it was a settled thing. So did Miss Belvoir as (from the organ gallery, with Mr. Porker beside her) she watched the Bishop of Lowminster giving away Miss Auberon.

"How truly paternal his manner is!" she whispered; and Mr. Porker—who was not always quick—said—

"Quite so! An amiable man, I fancy."

"Tut, tut! He's a deal more taken up by the bride's mother in her lavender silk than by the bride, for all her white satin and Mechlin and orange-blossoms! Bishops are like other people, and there's nothing like one wedding for bringing on another. He'd better too; or that Perkin will be perverting his mother, now Sylvia won't be on the spot to look after her. Marjory would be no good at all, and she has always been all on her brother's side. There! She's Lady Monksbridge now."

"And you think," said Mr. Porker, "you really think the Bishop——"

"It's as plain as the nose on your face." Porker put his hand up, and felt it; it *was* plain—but he was Warden elect for all that.

"And you think one wedding leads to—others?" he whispered.

"It ought to," Miss Belvoir declared firmly. "It's an old saying, and proverbs reflect great Human Truths."

Mr. Porker thought there might be something in it (his mind had wandered from the Bishop), and after all she was a Male Belvoir, whereas the Porkers of Pigginwhistle were only yeoman farmers. When Mrs. FitzSimon knew, she was quite glad the Wardenship had been cut down.

"They'll have nine hundred a year and her furniture," she said, "and for him that will be really too much."

As for Miss Belvoir, she congratulated herself that she would not have to move to a *house*. "I never did live in one," she boasted, "first in a Priory, then in a Gate, and now in a Warden's Lodge."

The Baroness came back to Cross Place; she and Mr. Bloom were Mamma's tenants for many years. They died within six months of each other; and ten weeks later the Bishop of Lowminster died too; then Mamma went back to Cross Place, and Hubert and I gave up our London home and went to live with her. Archdeacon Singer and Carry often stay with us, and get on much better with us, and with Perkin and Hermione, though we are all Catholics, than they ever did with Sylvia. Sylvia's eldest son is very like Perkin, and his mother never counted it to him for righteousness, though she liked to talk of the traditional Auberon face; but her only daughter (named after her august Godmother) is Sylvia's living image, and is Princess Hermann Glück von und zu Geldstein, who has opened more bazaars than any woman of her age in London.

The present Marchioness of Monksbridge, forty-nine years younger than her husband, is no relation of mine, and was born in Chicago—not of a "mediatized" family; and Lady Inverchlory, being a Bostonian, won't look at her.

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